PRIVATE EYE

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STRIKES: BROWN'S PLEDGE

A STAR ALLIANCE MEMBER

HOW DID WE COME UP WITH THE LONGEST BUSINESS FLATBED?

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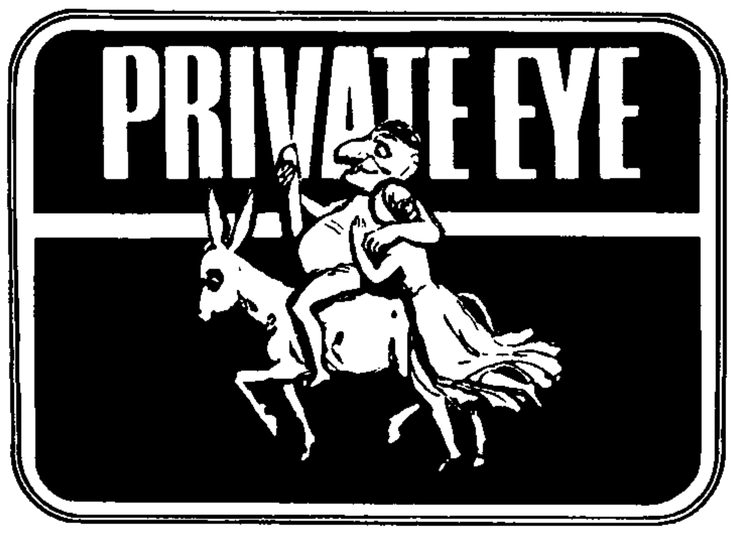
AIR NEW ZEALAND

Is it just a Kiwi thing?



The snow must go on

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ROYALL, PARDON?

HOUSE of Lords leader Lady (Jan) Royall promises to leave no stone unturned investigating the four Labour peers alleged to have been up for a bung. But how hot is she on upholding the upper house's inscrutability? A *last session* on the red benches just before Christmas suggests not very.

On 18 December the Lords voted through an amendment to the peers' code of conduct, prompted by a complaint from the *Private Eye* that Labour peer and former health minister Lord Warner had repeatedly failed to declare his interests in the private healthcare industry when speaking on a pro-private healthcare bill. He had only mentioned his outside jobs in the opening "2nd Reading" debate on the bill, but not in half a dozen later committee stage debates in front of different peers over the following months. So a clampdown? Er, no.

The Lords' privileges committee had exonerated Warner, claiming the code wasn't clear on the point (in fact it was, see *Eye* 1223). But instead of closing the loophole it recommended a change in the code so that interests don't have to be declared in each debate, merely at the start of each parliamentary stage.

Only Labour peer Lord Campbell-Savours objected to the relaxation, pointing out that the same let-out had been deliberately dropped from the code in 2001 and the privileges committee's proposals took the house back to 1995 (a vintage year for sleaze)!

Campbell-Savours was quickly overruled and the watering-down pushed through exactly as recommended by the privileges committee, whose members included… Lady Royall. Six weeks on, in the wake of the shocking revelation that some noble members might have less than noble motives, the Baroness promises an overhaul of the code she has just loosened. The *Eye* will be watching with (declared) interest.

● *Moron Peers p. 6*

NUMBER CRUNCHING

8 Inches of snow in Germany last month which led to "delays of up to 45 minutes" on public transport system

8 Inches of snow in London and south-east which led to total shutdown of most of the public transport system

"Bloody snow – I'll have to strike from home!"

THE THINGS THEY SAY

"I've just had a lunch with someone from Gazprom. One of the companies I advise advises Gazprom, I don't advise Gazprom directly. I'd get in *Private Eye* with even an indirect connection."

– Lord Truscott to *Sunday Times* investigators, January 2009

"Peter Truscott was once a humble Labour Euro MP. Then he became Lord Truscott, Energy Minister. Now he has become a consultant to a financial PR firm called Gavin Anderson, whose 'Public Affairs' unit specialises in what they call 'influencing legislation'. Gavin Anderson's most notable client? The controversial Russian energy giant Gazprom."

– *Private Eye*, 21 March 2008

CHINA PROTEST

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ABC

EYE TOLD YOU SO ❶

ONE silver lining to the cloud of economic gloom should have been the end of the private finance initiative.

Never has there been a better time to revert to the cheaper and quicker alternative of public borrowing for public investment. Even the politically flattering off-balance-sheet treatment of PFI no longer holds any appeal. Yet so wedded to PFI has the government been for 12 years that it would be too big an admission of failure to scrap it.

So urgently needed investment will still have to go through PFI under such labyrinthine processes as "building schools for the future", despite causing delays the economy can ill afford. The only way to raise private money, though, will be for the government – ie taxpayers – to guarantee the bankers' money.

The theory behind PFI was that the private sector shouldered the risk on deals. As the *Eye* has said for many years, this was always nonsense, but it was the pretence that allowed the government to fiddle cost calculations to make PFI look cheaper. Now deals will still cost PFI rates but, through the guarantee, the taxpayer will explicitly take the risk.

Meanwhile, state acquisition of banks that own PFI contracts means the taxpayer has effectively bought back large shares in a number of deals. Royal Bank of Scotland owns stakes in prison, hospital and other projects. The government can never let them fail but still pays over the odds.

Thus does the greediest of Gordon Brown's economic policies begin to eat itself.

Jobless Figures

EYE TOLD YOU SO ❷

"IT IS always better to leave when people are asking why you are going rather than when you are going," mused BT chief executive Ben Verwaayen when he resigned last April.

But could his sudden departure have been because he knew he was presiding over a vastly overrated company that for years had exaggerated its profits? After a review of contracts run by its Global Services division concluded two weeks ago that its accounting had been dodgy for four years, BT announced a £340m write-off, with a further hit likely to follow. Its share price duly tanked.

While the stock market and financial press were shocked, *Eye* readers won't have been. For one of BT Global Services' larger contracts is the £1.1bn deal to upgrade healthcare IT in London under the disastrous NHS IT programme. As *Eye* 1167 reported in September 2006, the deal was so botched that more than two years into it BT had earned just £1.3m while incurring irrecoverable costs running into hundreds of millions, but had not reported any loss.

Indeed the firm claimed great success for the contract. Shortly before BT's 2006 results announcement Verwaayen boasted: "Some of our colleagues have told their shareholders that they have difficulties. You have not heard us say that so far, and I don't think you will. We are in good shape."

The *Eye* pointed out how this misrepresented the company's finances and concluded its report: "Another one for the FSA, surely?" Perhaps the regulators will now take a look.

On the back of the dubious accounting, steady but fictitious profit growth could be reported to shareholders, enabling Verwaayen and Global Services boss Andy Green (also now departed) to hit their targets and trouser millions in bonuses. So will they now be asked to repay the cash? Watch this space.

Street Of Shame

GREED ALL ABOUT IT

"GREEDY beyond belief" was the *Daily Mail*'s verdict on "the bankers who can still afford to smile", a table of the earnings over the past decade of a number of business chiefs such as Lloyds TSB's Eric Daniels (£10.2m) and HBOS's Andy Hornby (£7.6m).

A few pages later, the paper was equally apoplectic over news that Royal Mail chairman Donald Brydon "will be paid £200,000 for working two days a week".

Outrageous. But in the cause of equal rights for fat cats everywhere, it is worth recalling that in the equivalent period, *Daily Mail* editor Paul Dacre has earned a total of £10.4m, and he pays Richard Littlejohn £900,000 a year for writing columns on precisely two days of the week.

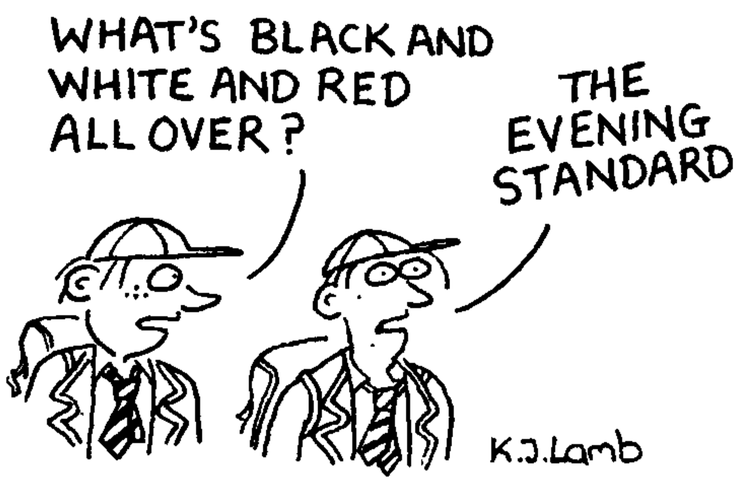
Meanwhile, at the other end of the ideological spectrum, the *Guardian* devoted a double-page spread to "Bonus Culture", dissecting how "bonuses help illustrate what happens when pay deals reward risk-taking". One such backhander the paper failed to mention was the "special bonus" of £150,000 *Guardian* editor Alan Rusbridger was awarded in 2005 "to reflect his role in the development of the new Berliner format" for the newspaper and its sister the *Observer*. Its introduction was the main factor in a huge increase in operating losses to £49.9m a year later – when Rusbridger got a bonus of £175,000.

The same day's paper also complained how "Directors of state-backed Lloyds asked for a pay rise", bemoaning the chutzpah of bankers who wanted extra dosh to compensate for the stress of being bailed out by the taxpayer. *Guardian* financial editor Nils Pratley chipped in: "Lloyds fat cats still trying to get at the cream… Right now Lloyds directors have zero bargaining power and should wake up to the fact." There was also an editorial railing against bankers' pay and demanding an end to "the age of excess". Shame the *Guardian* didn't name and shame these Lloyds directors… who include one Carolyn McCall, chief executive of Guardian Media Group!

Over at the *Express,* the message was clear too. "Banks' executives seem entirely unable to break the habit of the eye-popping bonus," a leader column thundered. "This is a disgrace. Ordinary people are seeing savings nosedive and jobs disappear."

Indeed – and not least at Express Newspapers, where 80 sub-editors have just been shaved off the already skeleton staff to "cope with the credit crunch and its continuing effect on us, the substantial drop in our advertising revenues and the continuing drop in our circulation figures."

Owner Richard Desmond's pay packet from his company Northern & Shell for 2007, the most recent year for which figures are available? A trifling £40m!



DAVOS DESPATCHES

WHEN he was plain "editor in chief" of the two *Telegraph* newspapers, Will Lewis could maintain a face of cruel executive efficiency. Alas, the thirsty one made the terrible mistake of venturing into print to pen Pooteresque reports from the Davos Economic Piss Up (*"Forum", surely? Ed.*)

When not raving about the quality of the dinners he had, Lewis's offerings included the observation that "the beauty of Davos is that one can meet large numbers of the world's most important/interesting/powerful/egotistical people". Such as, er, Will Lewis.

"It's a journalist's dream," he continued. But what were the high points of his journalistic foraging? Well, after a "what-I-did-on-my-holiday" description of his journey to the mountain resort, Lewis reported how he met Tony Blair in Davos and had a brief conversation with him. What about? Gaza? Gordon Brown? Don't be silly. They discussed Blair's waistline, with newshound Lewis opening his inquiries with: "Crikey, you've lost weight" and then going for the killer question: "What diet are you on?"

Blair replied: "None, really." End of hot scoop.

"Thirsty" then met Mark Zuckerburg, founder of Facebook, and used all his famed knowledge of business journalism to ask: "How come you are wearing a tie?"

Lewis's trip to Davos has, however, seen him at last succeeding in uniting his previously demoralised staff back home in London. They are all having a good laugh.

OVER at the *Financial Times*, meanwhile, where 20 reporters are being axed and pay frozen because of the advertising slump, editor Lionel Barber still swanned off to Davos with a large retinue of favoured hacks and executives.

Alas! The biggest story for *FT* readers was the number of top bankers and world leaders who were staying away. After learning that the top duo at Barclays bank were pulling out at the last minute, the *FT*'s People column on 28 January was reduced to this: "They will miss out on the fresh snow, which is deep and crisp and even, after gentle falls in the scenic mountain town where local kids fill the ice rink."

With such compelling coverage, advertising at the *FT* will surely pick up soon.

PRIVACY NEWS

ONCE more unto the beach for the paper which solemnly promised to "not in future purchase pictures taken by paparazzi", the *Daily Mail*, which over Christmas ran long-lens shots of 53-year-old fashion designer Donatella Versace in a bikini on a Caribbean beach.

"Once famed for her curves, she appeared tired and gaunt," commented a concerned Liz Thomas. "The mother of two's love of sunbathing has taken a heavy toll on her skin, which appears to be deeply wrinkled and loose on her emaciated frame. She has also desperately clung on to her long platinum blonde hair despite it making her appear much older."

Or at least it would have done, had the woman in question actually been Donatella Versace. American blogs Just Jared and Perez Hilton – which had run the photographs the day before Ms Thomas's sisterly intervention – subsequently received lawyers' letters on behalf of Versace and told their readers that the woman in question was actually "an Italian countess who has had a home on St. Bart's for over ten years".

The *Mail,* by contrast, simply deleted the article from its website without a word.

IT TOOK only eleven and a half years following the death of Princess Diana, but the complicated issue of where the blame lies in the relationship between paparazzi photographers and the editors who buy their photographs has finally been settled.

Not satisfied with the two large photographs it had purchased from pap agencies Splash and Big Pictures of Wayne Rooney's wife Coleen on holiday in Barbados (one of which showed her with family members on the deck of a boat, which was established by the press complaints commission in 1999 as "clearly a place where there was a reasonable expectation of privacy"), the *Daily Mirror* roped in columnist Polly Hudson to give her a dressing-down as well.

"Coleen needs to learn a lesson in humility and tact," Hudson raged. "It seems like she's going out of her way to rub our noses in the money she's recklessly chucking about, while the rest of us worry, scrimp and save… She can well afford a holiday somewhere private, where she won't be photographed so we won't have to see it."

O.B.N.AMA

"I was at the podium closest to the first family and the Bidens. I couldn't look over for very long. It's like looking at the sun."

LAURA LINNEY
Hollywood Reporter

"EVEN though some experts this week declared Britain to be on the verge of bankruptcy, that hasn't stopped the virulent expansion of the public sector non-job," sneered the *Daily Mail,* returning to a familiar theme, on 22 January.

"Hundreds of these are advertised in the *Guardian*'s Society pages on Wednesdays, which the *Mail* christened 'Jobzilla' because of the enormous amount of taxpayers' money they swallow."

Still, if you can't beat 'em, join 'em – the very same day's edition of "Career Mail", the paper's job section, was devoted to why readers should "consider a public sector job… They offer job security, better benefits and a work-life balance."

NUMBER CRUNCHING

£50m Shortfall in funding for Team GB at 2012 Olympics, which will mean reductions in size of national teams

£355m Amount being spent on Media Centre for 2012 Olympics

JUST FANCY THAT!

"In an article on November 3 2004 entitled 'Twins who swoop on owners in distress' we stated that 'rather than specialise in businesses in distress, the Barclays often take advantage of owners in distress to pick up assets on the cheap'.

It was not our intention to suggest, as some people may have understood it, that the Barclays frequently exploit vulnerable people in financial difficulty in an underhand and unfair way for commercial gain or to impugn their business ethics or integrity. We are happy to make the position clear and regret any distress caused. We are pleased to report that the Barclays, in return, have agreed to withdraw all the French proceedings which they brought against us."

– Apology printed by Times *in 2007 as part of settlement of criminal libel proceedings brought in French courts by Barclay brothers*

"The Woolworths brand is to be re-launched as an online retailer after being bought by *Daily Telegraph* owners, Sir David and Sir Frederick Barclay. The much-loved High Street chain went into administration in November and its more than 800 stores closed a month ago after struggling with debts of £385m. It is thought only a fraction of the former total of almost 30,000 staff will get their jobs back."

– BBC News, 2 February

"EXCLUSIVE" is often misused in newspapers, mischievously applied to stories lifted from rival titles to wind up writers and editors alike. But the word has taken on new meaning thanks to the *Daily Star*'s obsession with *Big Brother*.

Exclusives starring vertically challenged actor Verne Troyer and the visually enhanced Chanelle Hayes have abounded of late. "Mini-Me star Verne Troyer is to give new girlfriend Chanelle Hayes her Hollywood break in the movie *Austin Powers 4*," one revealed. "The sex dwarf was bowled over by Chanelle when they hooked up this week and thinks she could make it big in America. And Chanelle, 21, cannot wait to get her teeth into a shagadelic role and follow her idol Victoria Beckham, 34, to LA."

The unlikely coupling has provided yards of copy – all with the approval of the couple's management team, who have given editrix Dawn Neesom carte blanche to keep their protégés on the front page. When asked if the latest Verne story was exclusive, the statuesque Neesom replied: "This is so fackin exclusive it's only going on in my fackin 'ead!"

Close associates of the editor are more than a little worried about her pronunciation of Chanelle Hayes' Christian name. "It sounds a lot like 'Schnell! Schnell!' the way she screeches it," says one Desmond-attuned executive.

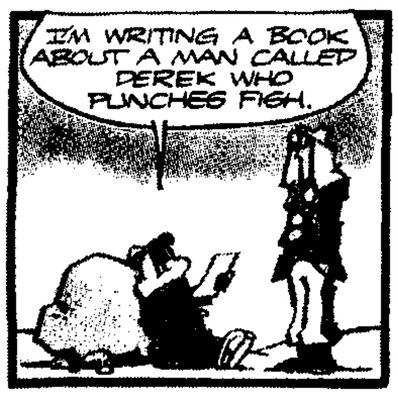
BETTER LATE THAN NEVER

"1st annual responsible mortgage lending conference, 9 March 2009."

– Upcoming event announcement from the Council of Mortgage Lenders

THOUGH famed for his lack of a sense of humour, even Richard "Dirty" Desmond occasionally glances at the Beau Peep cartoon strip, which has been appearing in the *Daily Star* since 1978.

Hence the panic that seized *Star* executives on 23 January when they noticed a frame in that day's strip *(see below left)*. Mindful of the fact that Dirty Des once punched Ted Young of the *Daily Express*, they hastily changed the next instalment *(below, right)*.



Star hacks are now wondering what else has crept past the censors. Could the Mad Pierre character who has been appearing in Beau Peep all these years be *Daily Express* editor Peter "Mentally" Hill? And Peep's girlfriend Doris: might she by any chance be related to *Daily Star* editor Dawn Neesom, aka Doris to her adoring staff?

A BIZARRE feature from *Times* "ocean correspondent" Frank Pope last month proposed preserving the UK-administered Chagos Islands as a human-free nature reserve, arguing that the former islanders "appear reluctant to return".

Shome mishtake, shurely? As *Eye* readers well know, the evicted islanders have been fighting protracted legal battles against the government, seeking permission to return. Was Pope too busy with his career as an underwater TV hunk, presenting *Thames Shipwrecks* for BBC2, to spot that last year the Chagossians yet again won permission from the high court to go home, only to have it rescinded by the law lords?

STANDARD & THE POOR

WHATEVER they think of the *Daily Mail*'s politics, hacks on rival titles have long admired (and envied) Associated Newspapers as an institution where even the most senior bean-counters and boxwallahs are subordinate to the editor-in-chief. That was how the Third Viscount Rothermere ran the company, with Sir David English and then with Paul Dacre, and when young Jonathan Rothermere succeeded his late father, he promised that the tradition would continue.

Not any more. By forcing through the sale of the *Evening Standard* to the KGB alumnus Alexander Lebedev, the bean-counters have effectively ended that editorial ascendancy. The wishes of Rothermere and Dacre are now subordinate to those of chief executive Martin Morgan and financial director Peter Williams.

"Aargh! I've been assassinated by the KGB"

Williams boasted gleefully to the *FT* that the company had "crossed the Rubicon", describing the *Standard* sale as "simply a commercial transaction, equally as if we had a loss-making B2B business… We are so much more than a newspaper company. To be honest we don't see this as a hugely significant event."

Rothermere, horrified by Williams's comments, put out a statement insisting that his company "remains fully committed to journalism and newspaper ownership". He may even believe this, but he's wrong. "It's all part of a management plan to get out of newspapers," one well-placed source tells the *Eye*. "If they could find a way to sell the *Mail*, they would. Dacre doesn't seem to realise what he's done by letting them sell the *Standard*. Vere [the previous Lord Rothermere] would be turning in his grave if he knew what Jonathan had done."

The formerly omnipotent Dacre is now an increasingly semi-detached figure, and since his return from a holiday he has been preoccupied with his official inquiry into the 30-year rule. In his absence the *Mail* has been run by vulgar second-rate lieutentants, and it shows: even hardened *Mail* hacks winced at a recent headline on a front-page news story referring to Harriet Harman as "Harriet Harperson".

Elsewhere in the building, furious *Standard* hacks would lynch Dacre and Rothermere if they could find them. Many will soon be made redundant, and the word is that Lebedev intends to pay no more than the absolute statutory minimum compensation. "The *Mail* has sold us down the river," one complains. "Some people here have worked for Associated for 20 or 30 years. It still makes loads of money but now it'll just wash its hands of its responsibilities to them. Not much *noblesse oblige* from the Viscount: he's basically saying, 'Fuck you, we don't care any more'."

Evgeny Lebedev, the new owner's 28-year-old playboy son, tried to cheer up news and features executives last week by giving them lunches at his upmarket Japanese eaterie Sake No Hana – and which has just been named "It Place of the Year" by *Tatler*, the magazine edited by Lebedev's chum and business partner Geordie Greig. But the rice wine and sushi had little effect. It was all too obvious that Evgeny, the *Standard*'s "senior executive director", may be quite charming but knows nothing whatever about newspapers.

The same could be said of Evgeny's fellow shareholder Justin Byam Shaw, now deputy chairman of the paper, whose experience is limited to telecommunications and "new media" such as the Poker Channel. Byam Shaw was supposed to pop in last Thursday to discuss pensions and redundancies with staff reps, but he didn't show up.

With outgoing editor Veronica Wadley ordered to stay at home and her deputy taking a well-earned holiday, the *Standard* office last week resembled a revival of *Waiting for Godot*. No sign of Alexander Lebedev (away in Moscow), or of Byam Shaw, or of Greig, who was expected to take over the editorship but whose appointment wasn't confirmed until Monday this week. Why the delay? Had the languid *boulevardier* only just realised – as some senior hacks suspected – that the job would require him to turn up before 5am every morning and work at least a 12-hour day?

Or was it that the Lebedevs couldn't offer him the lavish salary and perks for which he'd hoped? For a self-styled billionaire, Alexander Lebedev seems remarkably short of readies. Before the *Standard* purchase was completed, he had to pay £25m into an escrow account in order to prove that he had funds to keep the paper going. Petty cash for such a plutocrat? Apparently not: he had to sell a private jet and an estate in Umbria. "I have been searching my pockets very deeply," he wailed, "and selling everything I can to do this."

Only last year the *Forbes* rich list put his wealth at $3.5bn, but most of that is tied up in shares in Russian energy companies, whose share prices have nosedived.

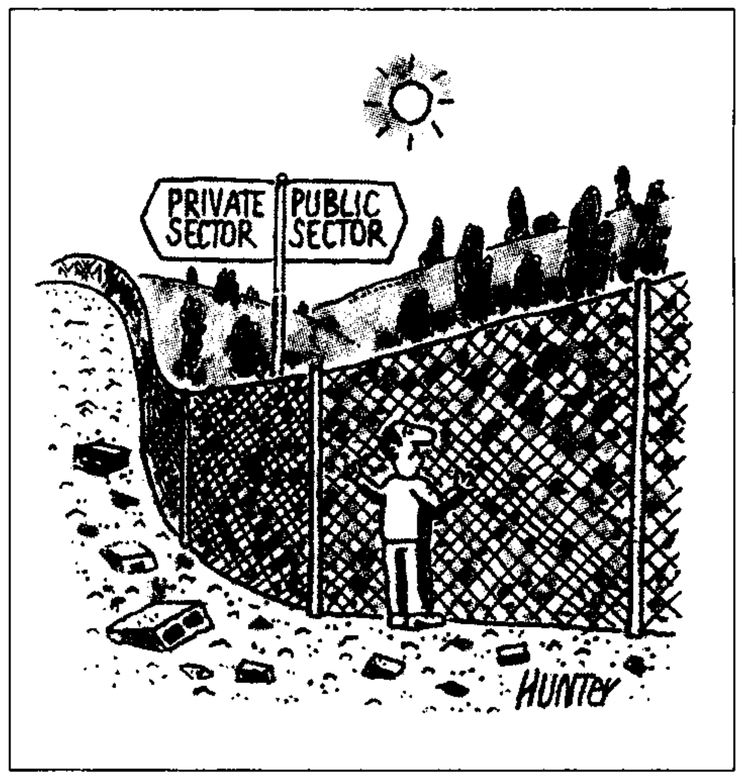
"The problem is I'm short of cash," he finally admitted to the *Sunday Telegraph* on 25 January, after the sale had gone through. "When I was thinking about this a year ago and I started negotiations about the *Evening Standard*, I had a nest-egg of $1.5bn in stocks, which is not there any more." He also revealed that the £25m already put up might be all he could afford over the next three years, after which he would wind up the paper if it were still losing money. "The last thing I want is to be short of cash, with the market moving against us and no revenues. Then we would have to close. I mean, these things happen in life."

But even that seems optimistic: £25m is enough to cover only *two* years of the *Standard*'s losses, on present form. What will happen after that? And where is all the extra investment he pledged? Answer came there none.

"INM shares surge on 'resilient' performance," the *Independent* reported last week, rejoicing at the latest trading statement from its parent company, Independent News and Media, whose revenues are down by just 3 percent.

"These results demonstrate that – even in tough economic conditions – INM continues to be a profitable and cash-generative business," the group said.

But the paper's otherwise comprehensive account omitted one telling line from the statement – that INM will now "focus on eliminating any loss-making businesses". As an INM source helpfully explained to the *Times*, *Guardian* and *Telegraph*, what this means is that Sir Anthony O'Reilly is "open to discussions" with potential buyers of his most incorrigible loss-makers, the *Independent* and *Independent on Sunday*. The *Indie* decided, wisely, to keep this distressing news from its readers.



WHAT kind of man is Peter Truscott, one of the Labour lords at the centre of the *Sunday Times* cash-for-amendments allegations?

Surprisingly, Truscott is working in partnership with a businessman twice convicted of possessing heroin with intent to supply. For he is a director of the Eastern Petroleum Corporation and African Minerals Ltd, both chaired and part-owned by one Frank Timis (see *Eyes passim*).

After fleeing his native Romania for Australia, Timis was convicted in 1990 for possessing heroin with intent to supply, and incurred a second heroin conviction in 1994. In 2002 the World Bank pulled out of a Timis-led attempt to dig for gold in Romania after campaigners had objected to plans to create massive cyanide-filled lakes. Then, in 2005, Timis claimed his oil firm, Regal, was sitting on a massive oil deposit off the Greek coast, and the share price soared. But the enormous reserves never appeared, investors did very badly and the London Stock Exchange is investigating to see whether there was "market abuse".

Timis probably hoped hiring a peer of the realm would bring respectability. Instead the noble lord has just brought yet more attention to Timis. Indeed, the *Eye* was alerted to Truscott's work with Timis by an anguished Sierra Leonean who wrote to Truscott to ask him to make sure Timis's company clears up alleged asbestos spills on land near Freetown. As yet, Truscott has not offered to help.

YET another lord at risk of expulsion from the red benches, if those with serious criminal convictions are kicked out, is Lord Nazir Ahmed of Rotherham.

During Lords questions last week, the Labour peer called for any British citizens who served in the Israeli armed forces in Gaza to face prosecution on their return to the UK. But should Lord Ahmed have called for *anyone* to face prosecution when he is only at liberty to attend Lords debates because the wheels of justice here move so slowly.

Ahmed is currently awaiting sentence for dangerous driving, following a crash in 2007 in which another driver died. He pleaded guilty in December 2008, admitting that he was sending and receiving text messages while driving in the dark on the M1. The district judge who heard the case at magistrates' court, transferred it to Sheffield crown court for sentencing, saying that his power to give out a six-month jail sentence was insufficient. Ahmed will be sentenced on 25 February and could be jailed for up to two years.

THE world-saving Gordon Broon is clearly thriving in the global financial crisis and remains an inspiration to fellow Scots.

The unkempt, jowelly hero of *Private Eye*'s "The Broonites" (left) is a a picture of health and vitality following his remarkably flattering makeover for a Burns Night guest appearance in the original "Broons" comic strip in Scotland's *Sunday Post* (right). A curious case of art imitating art imitating art imitating er… life.

CALLED TO ORDURE

WHITEHALL waffle has been given a tremendous spanking by a committee of MPs. The culprits, however, seem blithely untroubled by the criticism and have continued yarning away in the same old manner.

Led by Lib Dem Phil Willis (Harrogate), the innovation select committee let rip at the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (DIUS). Willis's committee concluded that this shiny new department – created by Gordon Brown from bits of the old Education Department – "relies too much on jargon" and has "not yet found its feet".

Bearing in mind that select committees tend to use restrained language, the MPs were in effect saying: "This department is a bullshitting shambles."

Willis and his heroes – that noun seems fair when you bear in mind the mountains of crap these poor sods have to plough through – attacked the "inaccessibility of the prose" used in the DIUS annual report. They found "jargon-riddled phrases, assumptions backed up with no clear evidence but designed to provide a positive tone, and euphemisms deflecting likely failure". Welcome to the world of modern government.

The Willis committee choked on DIUS phrases such as "creating a vision of success" and "challenging growth trajectory" and "true insights to needs and requirements". As the MPs observed: "The phrase 'true insight' begs the question, what sort of insight did they have of the 'customers' previously?"

Ah yes, "customer". The DIUS report used that word 19 times. Willis and his fellow MPs noted that a customer is someone who, having weighed up choices on offer, decides to spend money on goods or services. That concept hardly describes people who are dependent on a government department for grants.

When DIUS's top civil servant, Ian Watmore, appeared before the MPs he was given a richly deserved kicking. On the "customer" point he quietly accepted that "er, maybe 'client' for us is not a bad word". He then made the mistake of droning on about the DIUS "brand". Cue screams of agony from the MPs, some of whom were by now starting to develop distinct facial twitches.

Watmore was shown a passage from the DIUS report which claimed that "an overarching national improvement strategy will drive up quality and performance underpinned by specific plans for strategically significant areas of activity… the capital investment strategy will continue to renew and modernise further education establishments to create state-of-the-art facilities".

Bungler Watmore was asked what this meant. He was, the committee noted, "unable to explain the meaning of the passage" and "conceded that documents written by people in senior positions can often be very inaccessible to the public". Too right, mate! The MPs, with lovely understatement, said that "the departmental report is by most standards a poor read" and had an "impenetrable style". Parts were "impossible to read and understand" and there was a suspicion they were there simply to "fill a vacuum".

Terrific stuff, we can all agree. But when DIUS secretary of state John Denham and his fellow ministers turned up in the Commons a week later, they were as incomprehensible as ever. Denham wittered on about making his "Train to Gain" project "more flexible, especially with pre-level 2 skills". One of his sidekicks, Siôn Simon, was soon going on about "STEM-related, green-collar jobs". Another minister, David Lammy, became so confused by his own jargon, clichés and general verbal bilge that at one point a fellow Labour MP, the normally impeccably loyal Barry Sheerman, cried out "whaaaat?"

A glance at the DIUS website offers further evidence that little is being done to make its information more comprehensible. Biographies of ministers show, for instance, that Lord Young of Norwood Green is responsible for "skills pledge" and "world skills". Lord Drayson is responsible for "sponsorship of foresight" and "working across Government to deliver innovation through government procurement". The hapless Lammy looks after "building strong relationships across the HE sector", "transition to Customer First" and "research assessment exercise/research excellent framework in HE". Siôn Simon takes care of "implementing the machinery of government changes". Oh, and "English for Speakers of Other Languages".

You mean this lot are in charge of teaching English to foreigners? Help!

'Gavel Basher'

NUMBER CRUNCHING

£85bn Tax contribution from financial sector, supposedly crucial to the UK economy, from 1997 to 2007

£250bn Officially predicted increase in government debt, to be repaid from everybody else's taxes, following banking-induced recession

THE rigidity of Comrade Broon's Soviet-style forward planning will add an unwelcome £1bn-plus to the government's bills this year.

Back in 2002 the then Comrade Chancellor devised a formula that would dictate rent rises for 4.9m households living in social housing – properties owned by housing associations and local authorities. Rents would henceforth increase by the annual percentage rate of the previous September's retail price index (RPI), plus 0.5 percent, plus £2 per week. It was supposed to make rents fairer and easier to understand.

All went well at first, with inflation, and therefore rent rises, staying low. Over the past year, however, the RPI has yo-yoed. In 2008 it rose steadily, hitting 5 percent in September before falling back to 0.9 percent by the end of the year.

Such is the inflexibility of Brown's formula, however, that the high September figure will be applied to rent rises from this April. Bad news for the minority of tenants who pay their rent in full. But not so bad for the two-thirds who receive housing benefit – most of whom get *all* their rent paid by, er, the taxpayer, who will have to fork out an additional £1,170,169,000 over the next year. Brilliant!

DEFENCE secretary John Hutton's vanity on a recent trip to Afghanistan meant none of the accompanying media was allowed to film him wearing his body armour or helmet.

The minister gave strict orders that there was to be no picture of him looking silly. He was so concerned about looking ridiculous in the kit – which is compulsory on all RAF flights and in certain frontline bases – that camera crews were not even allowed on the same helicopter.

Fortunately, an American combat photographer, less inclined to take orders from the Ministry of Defence media minders, managed to capture the minister looking daft all the same. Nato's HQ in Kabul then attached the "look at my enormous rifle" photograph (below) to their press release.

DAVE'S DONORS KEBABED

Hedging his bets

CONSERVATIVE leader David Cameron promoted the idea of a cuddly "moral capitalism" in Davos last week, while before Christmas he made a speech denouncing "the irresponsible behaviour of individuals working in our financial services industry".

But his call for financial responsibility sits oddly with his appointment after Christmas of a distinctly Old Tory party co-treasurer whose company is registered offshore in the Cayman islands to avoid tax on its multi-million pound fund.

Last month Cameron appointed Stanley Fink, boss of the International Standard Asset Management (ISAM) hedge fund, as co-treasurer. ISAM is run from an office in Kensington but is registered in the Caymans for tax purposes.

Labour will seize on a Tory party treasurer being chief executive of a firm that's registered offshore to avoid tax. Er, or it would if Labour's own Lord Levy didn't happen to be the chairman of ISAM!

Don't call us

FOR the Tories to have one high-profile backer, in Carphone Warehouse boss David Ross, caught failing to declare his use of shares as collateral for loans might be considered unfortunate. For a second to emerge a few weeks later looks careless.

Ross's well-reported slip-up prompted the Financial Services Authority to invite anybody with similar undeclared arrangements to come clean about having breached stock exchange listing rules. At this point former Tory party treasurer and current donor Henry Angest 'fessed up.

On 23 January, Angest, chairman and majority owner of investment and private banking group Arbuthnot plc, admitted having pledged his 7.9m shares in the company, worth around £20m, as security for personal loans when he first led a management buy-out of the company in 1985.

Through an investment company, Flowidea Ltd, and another company, Wyler Ltd, Angest has donated £984,922 to the Tories since 2001 (and plenty more before then). When the "loans for peerages" scandal erupted three years ago while Angest was party treasurer, the Tories disclosed that they owed him personally £550,000 on an outstanding loan.

The latest register of MPs' interests shows that newly promoted shadow home secretary Chris Grayling registered financial support from Flowidea in September.

When David Ross was rumbled, he quickly resigned from Carphone Warehouse and other directorships, and as an adviser to the Olympics organising committee. But there is no sign yet of Angest doing likewise, nor of his relinquishing chairmanships of the influential London Investment Banking Association's banking committee and the Worshipful Company of International Bankers.

Transparently false

STANLEY FINK has promised as co-treasurer to promote "transparency" among party donors (even though his own business is hidden away in the Caymans), which chimes with Dave's exploitation of Labour's embarrassment over "proxy" donors and other funding irregularities.

In particular, the Tory leader has proposed a £50,000 limit on donations "to get rid of the impression that somehow rich people or big organisations or trade unions can buy influence". But his party's own accounts show how it is possible to get around this £50,000 limit.

Last year the party accepted £100,000 from companies controlled by the gambling millionaire Trevor Hemmings. But it took the money in a way that ensured the donation wasn't reported in the national press. The money came in two separate £50,000 payments made on the same day by two of Hemmings' companies. Crown Leisure, which sells one-armed bandits, gave £50,000 on 11 June; as did another Hemmings firm, Classic Lodges. Hemmings corporate HQ would not respond to inquiries about why the donation was made this way.

Lehman excuses

IN HIS December speech on the financial crisis Cameron demanded that "there should be a day of reckoning for those whose behaviour helped to bring about the financial crisis". He also complained that "some people working in the financial services industry paid themselves vast financial rewards – salaries and bonuses beyond the comprehension of most of us."

All of which was highly comical as the Tories had taken six-figure sums from the men at the centre of the financial crisis.

When *Private Eye* reported last September that one Lehman Brothers banker had generously funded the Tories (*Eye* 1220), we were in fact inaccurate: *three* executives from the bank whose collapse sparked the crisis gave more than £300,000 to the party – and, moreover, two of the donors were linked to an attempted massive bonus payout shortly before Lehman's demise.

Tory donor Christopher Gent was a Lehman director with a place on the bank's "compensation committee". This committee planned to pay £59m to five top executives just days before the bank went belly-up. Another Tory donor, Jeremy Isaacs, was chief executive of Lehman Brothers Europe and one of the proposed recipients of this largesse.

The Tories' third Lehman donor, Roger Nagioff, who gave the party £145,000, resigned from the bank with no other job to go to before its collapse. He stood down nine months after being made Lehman's "global head of fixed income", claiming that the regular commuting to New York was too much. His surprise resignation added to the investor unease that finally broke the bank. Just before Christmas Nagioff and Isaacs started a new firm together, JRJ investments.

EU-phemisms

When they were the USA's problem they were untried citizens. Now the USA want the EU to house them we've suddenly realised they're evil terrorist bastards

Give us our bailout!

HILARIOUS scenes at the high court have also underlined David Cameron's close links to those involved with the economic crisis.

Hedge fund RAB Capital bet the wrong way on Northern Rock, buying £50m in shares before the bank went bust. So it has taken the government to court to demand compensation. RAB Capital is run by Conservative party donor Michael Alen-Buckley, who has given the Tories £100,000.

RAB and the other Rock investors are bringing their case under human rights law, claiming that the government's refusal to treat Northern Rock as a "going concern" was a breach of their human rights. The party has so far refused to comment on RAB Capital's court case.

BROTHERS GRIM

THE wildcat strikes around the country may generate more interest in the activities of unions – not least the race to be the next general secretary of the Amicus section of Unite, Britain's largest trade union.

There are four candidates – Derek Simpson, Kevin Coyne, Jerry Hicks and Paul Reuter – but only the first three have any hope of winning.

Simpson, the incumbent, is having a tough time maintaining credibility among rank-and-file members. They are not impressed that he pays a peppercorn rent for a £800,000 grace-and-favour house in Berkhamsted, Herts, and pockets £126,939 as general secretary.

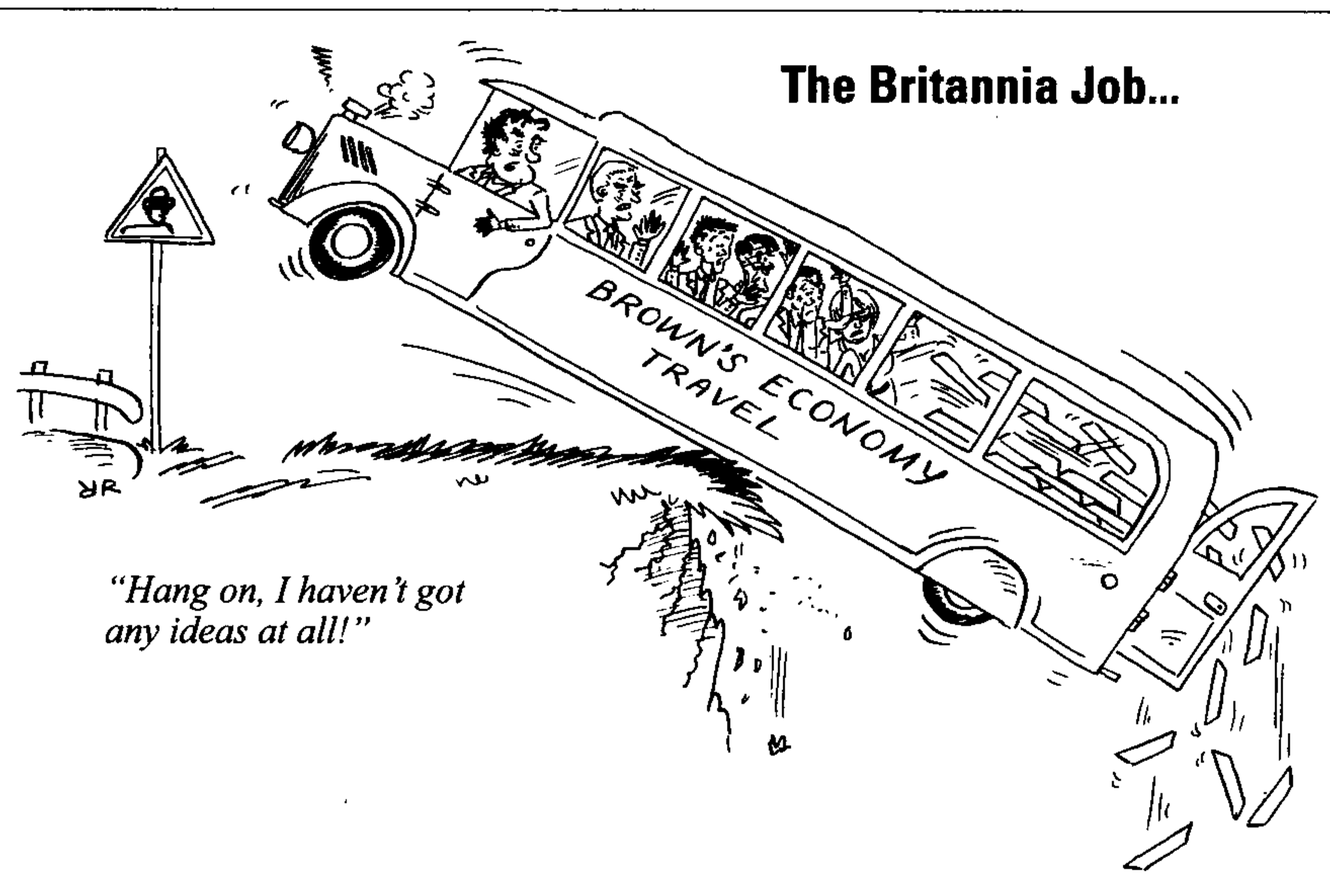
Then there's ersatz scouser Coyne, who despite a colourful past is seen by many as the front-runner. Coyne will be hoping that details of his past, when he and his brother Greg ran the Merseyside Trade Union and Unemployed Centre, do not emerge. Highlights of Coyne's Merseyside escapades in the 1980s include: alienating the centre's lower-grade employees to such an extent they went on strike; gifting jobs to cronies; bullying a development officer; and threatening legal action against anyone who dared expose what was going on (*Eyes* 720 & 722).

That leaves Hicks, without whom the election would not be happening. He forced it by successfully arguing that Simpson's attempts to remain in office beyond his elected period and to extend his term beyond his retirement date were in breach of the rulebook.

The legal precedent Hicks used was that in 2002 one Derek Simpson won a legal challenge against Ken Jackson, his predecessor, on the grounds that Jackson was trying to stay in power for longer than union rules allowed. *Plus ça change.*

'Blackleg'

The Britannia Job...



"Hang on, I haven't got any ideas at all!"

TV EYE

Question Time (BBC1)
Gaza Emergency Aid Appeal (ITV1, C4, Five)

LAST WEEK'S *Question Time* featured the usual dutiful trio of politicians from the main parties: Lord Falconer for the government, Michael Gove batting for Cam and a woman from the Lib Dems. Oh, and because the show was coming from Fort William, they had to have an MSP as well.

Imagine what would have happened if they'd abandoned this parliamentary parcelling-out and gone with a panel of five interesting people instead. There would have been immediate angry attacks by every party and motions signed by hundreds of MPs, complaining that the BBC had abandoned its statutory requirement to maintain political neutrality.

Similar rants and petitions would rapidly descend if the editors of the main evening news bulletins decided that there was really no news value in the comments of the Lib Dem representative on the government's drinking guidelines for under-15s or any other issue of the day.

And yet the same politicians who insist on broadcasters covering events at Westminster with a stopwatch and calculator rather than by using editorial judgement have spent the last week complaining that the corporation has itself insisted on sticking by the letter of the impartiality restrictions imposed on it by the government and by Ofcom.

The popularity of *Top Gear* and Take That reminds us that the fact that a lot of people think the same thing doesn't mean it's necessarily the right thing to think. And the arguments over whether broadcasters should have screened the emergency appeal for aid for Gaza are far more subtle and complicated than most discussions have acknowledged.

The ministers and MPs attacking the BBC have all either actually or tacitly supported the clause in the BBC's charter, renewed every decade, that requires it to be impartial under pain of legal punishment. There's an argument that this imposition is ridiculous and unnecessary – it leads to awesomely boring reports from Westminster and makes *Question Time* much duller than it would otherwise be – but politicians can't expect to pick and choose the issues to which it applies. If they want to get rid of the obligation to even-handedness, they've got a chance the next time it comes up for debate.

"Oh no! A schism!"

The main arguments of the hordes screaming for the appeal to be screened are all flawed (*Really? Ed.*) They say that emergency appeals have been shown before, but this has been in cases where the cause was politically neutral (earthquake, flood) or in cases of genocide (such as Rwanda), where the aggressors are easily defined and no reasonable person could defend them. In Gaza, there is a case that the Israelis are guilty of genocide but there is also a contrary body of opinion that they are exercising national self-defence. Outside of Northern Ireland, there has never been so contentious an issue for British journalism (*see Letters next issue. Presumably. Ed).*

The other argument is that viewers are clever enough to distinguish between a news report and an appeal. That's true; but most of them are also quite capable of being able to watch a news report without hearing the opinions of all three parties. Politicians have given broadcasters a statutory requirement to treat viewers as stupid.

Another objection is that other broadcasters have shown the film. But no other network is bias-policed by politicians as strictly as the BBC. *Channel 4 News*, for example, long ago abandoned much pretence at impartiality. Jon Snow openly hosts a bulletin of liberal values and is at risk of havi ng his collar felt by Ofcom for beginning a discussion about George W Bush's departure from office with the words: "The nightmare is over!"

The complexity of the issue is shown by the fact that one of the BBC's allies was the Digger. Murdoch is dedicated to the destruction of the corporation, and the coverage by his newspapers and Sky News of the Jonathan Ross scandal was an example of the way in which his media operations can be turned against the hated rival. There would have been massive strategic advantage for Murdoch in turning on Mark Thompson over the Gaza appeal: it's not implausible that a concerted campaign could have forced the BBC D-G's resignation. And yet this opportunity was rejected, with Sky News also refusing to screen the plea.

Now, the Digger does nothing for pure reasons. His network's reticence most likely came from a fear that some of his business interests in the US and the Middle East might be affected by seeming to side with the Palestinians. But even that decision would establish that this charitable intervention is not a neutral act.

Just 48 hours after asserting the BBC's absolute independence as the reason for not screening the DEC appeal, communications minister Lord Carter was announcing that the BBC would be "taking the lead" in achieving the government's goal of a rapid roll-out of high-speed broadband. That doesn't sound very impartial and demonstrates once again the BBC's problem of being legitimised by the government but supposedly not run by it.

But if politicians don't like these arrangements, they have the power to change them.

'Remote Controller'

MEDIA NEWS

BEFORE suppressing last week's Gaza appeal from the Disasters Emergency Committee, BBC director-general Mark Thompson naturally sought guidance from experts.

"Thompson consulted the corporation's charity appeals advisory committee – made up of representatives of NGOs and international charities – about whether an appeal should be broadcast," the DG's spin-doctors told the *Guardian*. "They raised concerns…"

This came as a surprise to members of the appeals advisory committee (AAC), who received no emails about the Gaza appeal before Thompson banned it. The *Eye* has found one member who was approached for his opinion by the committee's manager – but who raised no concerns at all, fully endorsing the DEC appeal. Another member has since resigned in protest at Thompson's decision. In his resignation letter he notes that the committee "had no involvement" in the process.

WHILE the BBC was roundly hammered in the media for refusing to broadcast the Disasters Emergency Committee (DEC) appeal for Gaza, no one criticized the tactics of the DEC under its chairman Mike Walsh in deciding to go for an immediate appeal.

The DEC, an umbrella organisation that coordinates responses to humanitarian disasters, held an all-day meeting for its 13 members at WPP's offices at 6 More London Place on Wednesday 21 January. During breaks, matters spilled out in to the reception area. Conflicting views about the merits of launching an immediate appeal were overheard, as well as some anti-Israeli invective that might have given strength to the BBC's worries about broadcasting the appeal.

The DEC knew the BBC was having doubts about airing an appeal, but Walsh, whose responsibility is to balance the interests of the DEC members, the media and those who are suffering in an emergency, decided to press ahead anyway and assumed the corporation would fall into line.

Walsh, a perma-tanned ad man who is the long-time chairman of agency O&M, may have felt he wanted to show support for the newest member of the DEC, Islamic Relief, by calling for an immediate appeal but he miscalculated. Even though the DEC has emerged as the winner in terms of PR, there are those who worry about the charities' long-term relationships with the BBC. The value of the long-term relationships with the media to the humanitarian sector is immense, not least in terms of free media space worth millions. Walsh, an ad man, should have understood that.

NUMBER CRUNCHING

3 Minutes of airtime BBC refused to give to Gaza appeal citing fears over impartiality

83 BBC news reports devoted to the decision and ensuing row

"IMPARTIALITY is something I believe the British public passionately wants," said BBC director-general Mark Thompson last week during the Gaza appeal row. But the quest for impartiality at the Beeb has been rather partial of late.

The BBC News at Six and Ten, the BBC News Channel and BBC Online all found time and space to report extensively the impending return of Jonathan Ross's chat show to BBC1.

"People queued outside Television Centre for the star's recorded show," revealed the BBC several times, quoting an audience member: "It was really funny." Oddly, rival news channels did not see fit to cover this ground-breaking story. But the Beeb's "appeal" hit home: the programme was not starved of viewers.

LUVVIES

"It's like I've escaped from a serious car accident and need to understand what has just happened. When I leave a character, I have to analyse the trance through which I have just passed. It can take me several months to say goodbye to them."

KATE WINSLET
WENN News

Submitted by Joe Mourant.

An occasional column devoted to gems from the acting profession. £10 paid for entries.

"I've got it! We get Jonathan Ross to do the Gaza Appeal"

CLOSED ALL HOURS

MEDIA companies employ in-house lawyers because it's cheaper than paying Messrs Sue, Grabbit and Runne triple time when hacks need to consult them before a 3am deadline.

But GMTV, which has even later deadlines, employs a "head of compliance & legal affairs & company secretary" who is unhappy with the management's attempts to call on his services at all hours.

Programming director Peter "McHic" McHugh recently sent a company-wide email telling staff to consult the in-house lawyers about changes to competitions – a wise precaution after the multi-million-pound phone-in fraud that has hobbled the company.

"Let me remind everyone competition links may not be changed," he wrote. "If you have concerns out of hours, ring the [in-house] lawyer Greig Morrison at home or contact me."

This was not what Morrison wanted to hear. He hit back: "Let me remind everyone that calling me out of hours will NOT enable competition links to be changed... You'll appreciate I can't do that remotely or at next to no notice."

Lawyers in other organisations – the BBC, Sky, Associated Newspapers, News International – often have to make tough calls at a moment's notice, even at antisocial hours. But not at GMTV, apparently. As Morrison explained: "Personally on Sunday afternoons/evenings I'm often on planes or driving."

GOING LIVE

***BBC BREAKFAST* presenters Bill Turnbull and Sian Williams quizzed BBC director-general Mark Thompson for a full ten minutes on 26 January about the corporation's decision not to run the Disasters Emergency Committee's Gaza appeal, during which he confirmed that the Beeb would not be running it.**

Then, after a brief break for local news, they went live to a reporter standing outside Television Centre to "get the latest" on the story.

Meanwhile, in another bizarre live link-up, Radio 4's *Today* programme went live to intrepid Graham Satchell in Thetford Forest to report on the menace caused by the increasing number of wild deer in Britain.

"It's a beautiful morning here," he enthused. "We haven't seen any deer yet… but there are thousands of them around us."

***CHANNEL 4* News presenter Jon Snow was in full froth in his daily "Snowmail", the email sent to subscribers on the programme's website, on the day of Obama's inauguration.**

"In more than 30 years of reporting I have never seen the like, never seen so many people of so many different hues, never experienced the joy and expectation of so many. I have been to big funerals, coronations, summits, papal anointings. But I have never seen anything on this scale, in a western city, in a western nation… For black people across the world this date, 20 January 2009, and for people of all races, whatever happens in the future, however disappointing, will be marked as a day of singular achievement."

It was left to his colleague Alex Thomson, stranded back in Gray's Inn Road, to throw a bucket of cold water over his colleague: "I sincerely hope we will try to avoid portraying Barack Obama as The Second Coming as so many others seem desperate to do," he grumped in a terse postscript. "How about some journalism?... Oh, and he's not America's first black President either. He's mixed race."

DUMB BRITAIN

Are You Smarter Than A 10-Year-Old, Sky One

Presenter: According to legend, who shot an apple off the top of his son's head?

Contestant: Well, straightaway I'm thinking of Isaac Newton.

Breakfast Toaster Quiz, Heart FM

Presenter: Emmental and Double Gloucester are both types of what?

Caller: Banks.

Radio Scotland

Presenter: Which Boris recently became Mayor of London?

Mikey *(from Big Brother)*: Yeltsin.

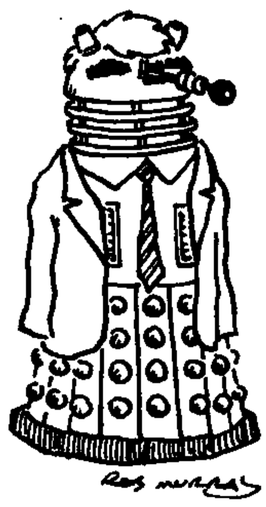
Presenter: No, it was Boris Johnson. Which publication was Boris Johnson the editor of?

Mikey: The Sun.

MUCH humming and hawing at the BBC over the correct response to a freedom of information request to know how much the corporation has spent on management consultants in the past three years.

The final sum was an eye-watering £20m, of which £9m came in the last belt-tightening year alone: a threefold increase on the figure for 2005. Half the cash from the last financial year went to a single firm, Deloitte.

Staff at Ernst & Young, meanwhile, are left wondering what exactly the £1m-worth of services they provided for the BBC in 2007-08 were if they weren't consultancy – they feature nowhere in the BBC's sums.



Among items skimmed off were such activities as advice on the sale of the BBC's Red Bee Media division; the salaries of E&Y staff seconded to the Beeb; and auditing proposals that, despite being outsourced to E&Y, were helpfully excluded from the calculations.

AD NAUSEAM

THE latest ad for the BBC's digital radio station 6Music, entitled "Get An Earful", features an animated figure painted on a wall with an ear instead of a snout. It wanders about sucking-up musical influences from open windows.

The ad was "created" by Rainey Kelly Campbell Roalfe/Y&R. We say "created" because the ad is a shameless rip-off of an animation called "Muto" by an artist named Blu, that was released on the internet in May last year. The artist has said on his blog that he doesn't license his work for any commercial use.

One wonders whether the creative team of Ted Heath and Paul Angus told their creative director, and whether he or she in turn told the BBC, that the idea came courtesy of YouTube. Even though Blu's original piece has been viewed more than 5m times, it didn't seem to bother RKCR/Y&R. This is a pattern that is becoming increasingly prevalent in advertising. One way to stop it might be for the BBC to demand its money back.

ANOTHER riveting *Times* T2 feature last week, this time about freezers.

It ended with space-filling vox pops, in which Gillian McKeith, Kerry Katona and a couple of equally eminent *Times* writers revealed what was in their freezers. Giles Coren? "My freezer is empty apart from some bison grass vodka... I don't cook from frozen as I don't have a microwave and never plan far enough ahead to defrost stuff. Also I have all the time in the world to buy food fresh when I decide to cook."

Whoops! Let's hope no one tells his paymasters at Bird's Eye, where Coren is the face of, er, fish fingers.

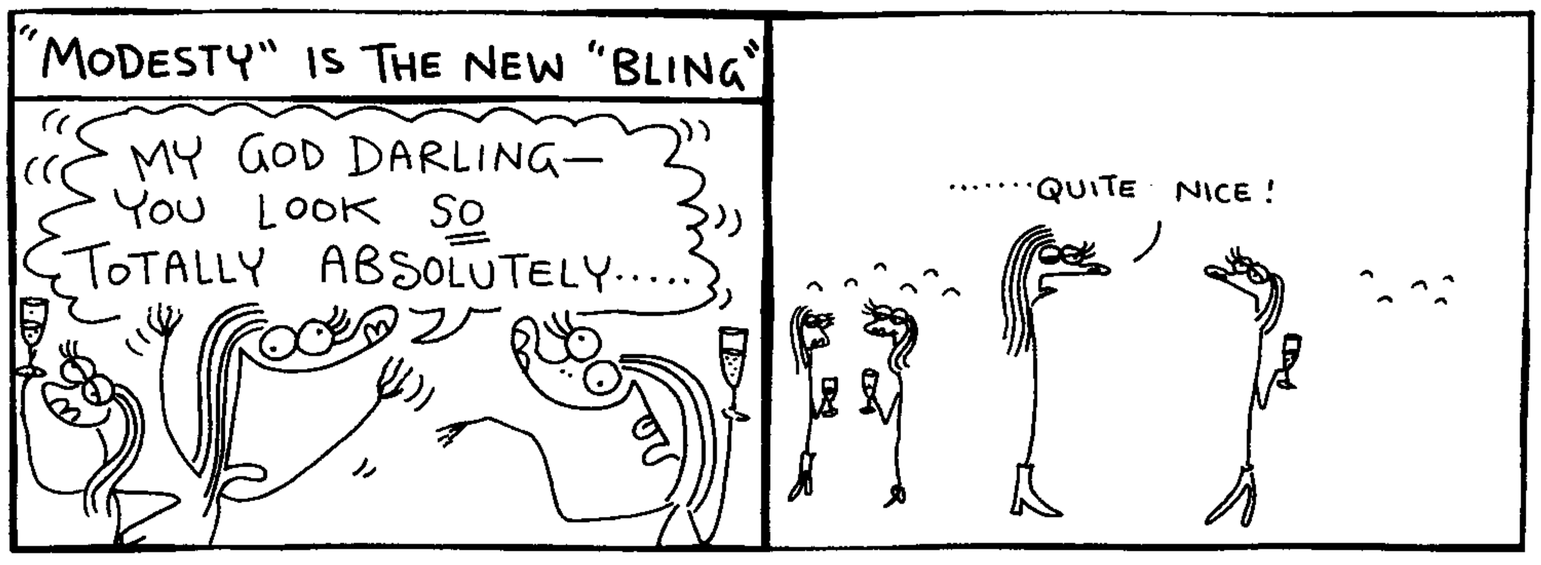
WHEN Scottish Television announced in December that it was going to opt out of FA Cup coverage – for which its parent company ITV and partner Setanta had paid £425m – viewers were told the airtime would instead be used to "showcase locally-produced output such as Scottish drama".

So how is that going? Well, on 24 January, while the rest of Britain enjoyed Hartlepool v. West Ham and Manchester United v. Spurs, STV viewers were treated to the tartan-tinged delights of a repeat of Hertfordshire-filmed *Dancing on Ice* and films *Baby Boom*, in which "a supercharged New York business executive finds her life turned upside-down", and *Junior*, starring Arnold MacSchwarzenegger.

On Wednesday 4 February, when Everton are due to replay Liverpool following their fourth round draw – viewers in Scotland will instead be treated to an episode of *Foyle's War*, the detective series set in the highlands of, er, East Sussex, and an episode of *Cops With Cameras* following officers in such far-flung Caledonian outposts as Oldham, South Wales, Kent and Lewisham.

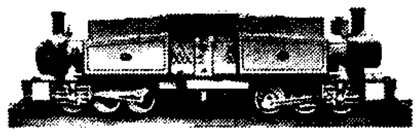
SUPERMODELS

KERBER



SIGNAL FAILURES

Lord help us



LABOUR's Lord Snape, who denied allegations in the *Sunday Times* that money would persuade him to propose amendments to legislation, but were his lengthy contributions to debates on the local transport bill last year related to his role as a "consultant" for FirstGroup?

One of his concerns was the bill's promotion of "quality contracts", the means by which councils can take charge of local buses if the services offered by unregulated private operators aren't up to scratch. The bill was enthusiastically supported in the Lords by Lord Rosser and other Labour peers. But during debates Snape carped repeatedly that Rosser had been briefed by the local councils' Passenger Transport Executive Group (PTEs being accountable to councils in big cities).

The PTEG says it didn't pay Rosser a penny and that he took its briefings because as a former trade union leader he felt strongly on the issue. Snape, on the other hand, openly declared in the Lords that he carried out "consultancy work" for FirstGroup and was "a declarable shareholder" in National Express Group (owner of Birmingham's buses).

He had plenty to say on the relationship between councils and private bus operators: one speech ran to 1,700 words. "If we are to discuss partnerships, bus operators… are surely entitled to have their voice heard. Partnership must be just that." Moreover, he said PTEs, not bus firms, were to blame for passengers' main complaints (he forgot to mention costly fares). Snape also fretted over "investor confidence in the bus industry" if councils were allowed to have too much control; and he sought ministerial assurance that the bill would protect "the legitimate interests of bus operators and passengers" and that quality contracts "will be used only as a last resort by sensible authorities".

Labour in fact enabled councils to create quality contracts years ago; but it put up so many bureaucratic hurdles that none was ever established. The new bill, which was passed at the end of last year, streamlines the process and still allows firms like FirstGroup to have a say.

Snape proposed amendments for an extra "public interest test" and stronger appeal rights for bus firms, both of which could have deterred some councils from trying to clip the wings of FirstGroup et al. His amendments were rejected.

SNAPE is just one of FirstGroup's chums in Westminster.

As America's largest operator of yellow school buses, the firm tried flogging the idea to British councils and in 2007 set up the "Yellow School Bus Commission" to conduct an "entirely independent" review, with academic support from Aberdeen university (where FirstGroup chief exec Moir Lockhead is an honorary professor).

Labour MP and former education secretary David Blunkett chaired the "commission" in return for up to £25,000 from FirstGroup, which sent him and a member of his staff to the US in 2008. His report advised Britain to spend up to £250m a year getting thousands more kids on to school buses (not unlike FirstGroup's).

FirstGroup also paid for accommodation, meals and travel for Labour MP Jim Sheridan when he studied yellow buses in New York and California last September.

WORSTGROUP's relationship with Labour isn't so intimate in Scotland, where the SNP government angered Labour MSPs by extending First ScotRail's franchise last April (*Eye* 1209).

In November Audit Scotland said Transport Scotland, which manages FSR's contract, "did not consult on the franchise review and extension options with external bodies". FSR had told TS "the agreement was price sensitive. Consequently, Transport Scotland was concerned that public disclosure about the review and negotiations could influence market activity" but TS didn't seek advice on that. TS didn't even give Scotland's transport minister a fully documented business case.

Why was TS so sensitive about FirstGroup's share price? Audit Scotland didn't answer that question but noted that Guy Houston, TS's £90,000-a-year finance director, held FirstGroup shares and share options and attended "key meetings" where franchise extension was discussed. There was no record of him declaring an interest at those meetings or removing himself from discussions. When Audit Scotland's report was published, he resigned without working his three months' notice.

Houston was formerly FirstGroup's UK bus finance director. TS didn't know of his shareholding until after he got the TS job. Last month MSPs on Scotland's audit committee were told it was none of their business what pay-off Houston's fellow civil servants arranged for him.

'Dr B Ching'

MEDICINE BALLS

Scope for improvement

LAST month Somerset primary care trust should have published the findings of an investigation into the standard of colonoscopy performed at Shepton Mallet independent sector treatment centre (SMTC) between October 2005 and March 2008. The report has yet to be made public, but doctors have been expressing doubts about the service since its inception.

Unlike heart surgery, where failures can be catastrophic and immediate, the failure to diagnose cancer with a colonoscopy can take several years to manifest. Patients are given the all clear, and it often isn't until symptoms get much worse that they are reinvestigated. SMTC, like most independent sector centres, was not set up to take patients with suspected cancer, but rather to cream off the easier, low risk patients and leave the hard stuff to the NHS. However, bowel cancer can present with minimal symptoms and it was inevitable that cancer patients would be referred there.

Back in 2006, an NHS endoscopist expressed concerns about the standard of reports coming out of SMTC: "One report was brief and quite frankly unintelligible. It used medical terms I had not heard, the English was poor and my only conclusion was that whoever had done the investigation had little knowledge of colonoscopy. I was furious that my PCT (North Bristol) would consider sending patients to such a unit and feared for the standard of work being done. I took these colonsocopy reports to the PCT stating my concerns and hoped that the professional executive committee would act upon them."

Alas, it wasn't until a year ago, when another doctor demanded to know how his patient had been given the all clear at SMTC in August 2007 but was found to have cancer in February 2008, that a review was started. A GP has since contacted the *Eye* to say that two of his patients had cancers apparently missed at SMTC. One died last year at home from rectal cancer, another was discovered to have a tumour on rectal examination six months after his normal colonoscopy and now has metastatic disease. Another patient, Steve Davies, was found to have three tumours after having a "normal" colonoscopy and died eight months later (see *Eye* 1226).

Unlike most hospitals, SMTC records DVDs of its colonoscopies and has already reviewed 1,828 patients, who were mostly scoped by one Dutch doctor, Ben Mak. In the case of one patient who developed cancer, Mak was found not to have carried out the procedure satisfactorily and the patient notes were "inconsistent with the DVD". Thirty-four other patients were correctly diagnosed as having cancer. Four other patients were found to have developed cancer that was not diagnosed but "their procedures did not show any signs of misdiagnosis". Dr Mak was suspended pending the inquiry and has since resigned.

Colonoscopy requires a lot of skill to pick up low colonic cancers and a full assessment for cancer should include a digital examination too. What's more troubling is that early warnings about the standard of reporting at SMTC may have been ignored. Many doctors who complained about the quality of care at private sector treatment centres across England were dismissed by Labour as being ideologically driven and we still don't have an error reporting system that allows swift investigation to prevent patients from unnecessary harm. The final report about knee surgery failures at another treatment centre in Weston-super-Mare (*Eyes passim*) remains unpublished, two years later.

UK endoscopists have to go through rigorous training to be accredited, and it's vital that overseas doctors working in the NHS can operate to the same standards. The lessons are clear. If you sacrifice quality to get waiting times down, it comes back to haunt you. And as soon as concerns are raised anywhere in the NHS, they must be acted on.

M.D.

ECO-GNOMICS

Chic tricks

IT MAY only be February, but a contender for silliest green press release of the year has already emerged courtesy of this month's fashion trade event Pure London at Olympia.

"London is green with envy for eco-chic!" claims the headline over a lot of blather about how "influential celebrities and top UK designers including Alexa Chung, Daisy Lowe, Stella McCartney, Luella Bartley, Vivienne Westwood and Peaches Geldof [?!] have developed a green conscience and started to delve into the ethical fashion world." Vintage wear apparently is more and more popular, as is "clothing which does not damage the environment and has a social conscience".

According to the release, this means that despite the financial squeeze, shoppers are more prepared to "invest in timeless pieces that last more than one season" and that the hunger for "cheap 'fast fashion'… is diminishing amidst the consumer's sound ethical conscience".

Hence Pure London's creation of an "ethical fashion" section this year. But how have the influential designers committed themselves to a greener future? By cutting down on travel to all those shows? Abandoning sweatshop production lines in distant poor countries? Cutting the carbon footprint of manufacturing? Reducing the water footprint of cotton production?

Er, not entirely. "When it comes to animals, Izzy Lane's collection of beautiful cashmere and knitted coats, dresses, and skirts are all made from rescued sheep that would have been sent to slaughter. Spared from the Butchers [sic] table, the collection consists of cutting edge fashion designed and produced on home turf, here in Britain."

For those seeking a more iconic gesture, "revolutionary recycled accessories brand Little Earth takes American car licence plates, hubcaps, fenders and car tyres and turns them into stunningly desirable handbags, each one hand embellished with Swarovski crystals."

Elephant lovers, meanwhile, will note that "accessory brand Artisan Life replaces the slaughter of elephants for their ivory tusks with stunning pieces of jewellery made from a vegetable form known as tagua seeds".

All this eco-drivel could only end with one possible slogan. Yes: "Green is definitely the new black!" And the PR firm responsible? Good Results!

ROTTEN BOROUGHS

FOCKING KENT

KENT county council's bold experiment in being the first local authority to run its own internet TV station has not been universally welcomed in the Garden of England. Or universally watched.

One man of Kent who thought he had a democratic right to criticise the use to which his council tax was put got a shock when he did so. Bob Geldof's production company Ten Alps, which makes Kent TV, threatened him with m'learned friends for having the temerity to say he didn't think it was up to much.

Margate blogger Tony Flaig had been a regular critic of KTV. Not only did he describe the £1.6m spent on the channel – launched in September 2007 by Nigel Dacre, brother of the *Daily Mail*'s Paul – as "Kent's most contentious waste of money", but he also claimed it devoted too much time to interviews with members of the ruling Tory party.

Although Mr Flaig wasn't glued to KTV, it paid extremely close attention to his blog. He received a pompous letter from Jo Phillips, "director of communications" for Ten Alps, claiming he had made "inappropriate, unlawful and damaging defamatory allegations about Kent TV and the people who work there". Ms Phillips, who has since left the company, concluded: "Please therefore ensure that your blog does not publish any further defamatory statements about Kent TV. I trust you will not do so, but if you do, you should note that Ten Alps reserves the right, if appropriate to protect the reputations of our staff, to initiate legal proceedings without further reference to you."

The letter had the desired effect. Since receiving it last year Mr Flaig, a railway tracklayer, has desisted from criticising KTV for fear of a writ. "What next?" he asks the *Eye*. "Will Tarmac sue me if I say Kent's roads are crap?"

He has been unable to establish whether council leader Paul Carter endorsed Ten Alps's threatening letter. Last week he received an opaque missive from Geoff Wild, Kent CC's director of law & governance, containing the line: "If you continue to choose to exercise your right to free speech in the manner that you do – as is your right – you must expect to take whatever consequences the law provides..." Very reassuring.

Kent resident Geldof – he lives in a modest priory near Faversham – countered criticisms of KTV by appearing on it before Christmas. With his customary exactitude, Saint Bob explained: "It's the old establishment versus the new kids on the block. This spurious beating up of Kent TV on the notion that it's political is rubbish, it's a commercial attack. It's a great service – it's precisely what should happen with this amazing thing." Oh, *do* fock off, Bob!

● TORY Poole borough council has determined that it needs to cut the cost of buying goods and services. Fair enough. Its first step has been to hire a "business transformation consultant" for six months to tell it how to make savings... for a fee of £65,000. No cigar!

MARTIN WHO?

ANOTHER WEEK, another vote of no confidence to ignore in Doncaster.

A motion put by Labour group leader Joe Blackham calls on mayor Martin "the buck stops here" Winter to accept "full responsibility" for the failures in the council's children and young people's service, which have seen seven children die of abuse or neglect in recent years (*Eye* 1228), and resign. Meanwhile Edwin Simpson, leader of the council's Lib Dem group, calls the mayor "the Mugabe of Doncaster" because of his reluctance to do the decent thing. Some feel this is unfair to the president of Zimbabwe.

Three years ago Winter's deputy Aidan Rave, 13¾, resigned after a failed coup against the mayor, citing Winter's unacceptable behaviour, failure to observe the standards expected in public life, etc, etc. Rave, a favourite of Doncaster Central MP Rosie Winterton, went off to work for Rockpools, a recruitment firm with close links to New Labour (*Eyes passim*).

With Rave sorted, the party threw its weight anew behind Winter. A statement was issued by the office of Don Valley MP Caroline Flint, declaring: "We hope Aidan Rave's decision to step down as deputy mayor will not hinder the important work Doncaster's elected **Labour** mayor Martin Winter and **Labour** councillors are doing... The improvements that have happened over the last few years have not been by accident but because of the hard work of a **Labour** mayor, councillors and MPs working together..."

But Winter isn't **Labour** any more and there's a mayoral election coming up. History is being rewritten to finger Winter as messing up big-time all on his own, with not a **Labour** councillor or MP in sight. Just fancy that!

LAIRD OFF

HARD-UP Cheltenham borough council last week embarked on a futile seven-week high court case aimed at extracting more than £1m from its former chief executive, Christine Laird.

The council alleges that Laird, who was forced out in 2005 after more than a year off sick, had concealed a history of depression when she applied for the post in 2002, which she denies. All concerned agree that relations between Laird and Lib Dem council leader Andrew McKinlay broke down entirely, and that Laird's health today is much poorer as a result. The council claims it is its duty to "recover" the £1m it claims her recruitment, salary and pension have cost; Laird's friends say they fear for her future health – and anyway she doesn't have that kind of money. It looks as if, whatever the result of the case, Cheltenham's taxpayers are going to be hundreds of thousands of pounds the poorer.

Smart work.

"... and would you be interested in keeping the next customer waiting for ages while I try to sell you lots of crap?"

● CLIFF MORRIS, Labour leader of Bolton council, has a nice little sideline, three days a week as chairman of the Bolton Hospital NHS Foundation Trust. He's just had an 80 percent rise, bringing his pay up to £41,500 on top of the £38,570 a year he gets as full-time leader of the council. Respect! Health union members, who are getting a 2.7 percent rise this year, aren't impressed. Cllr Morris has the perfect riposte to such dogs-in-the-manger. "It's not me that is getting the £18,500 pay rise, it is the role," he tells the *Bolton News*. Er, right.

IT'S A STEEL

STRUGGLING businesses could learn a thing from the can-do approach of Brymbo Developers, a company formed to redevelop an old steelworks site near Wrexham, North Wales. The company received more than £7m from the Welsh assembly government to clean up the site so it could sell the land to house builders.

In 2005-6, the last year for which accounts have been filed, Brymbo reveals that it made £16.4m from land sales – and paid its shareholders a staggering £14.7m in dividends. The accounts do not lie: "The gross margin is substantial and can be attributed to the sale of land."

The site now has more than 500 houses on it but a promised road linking the development to the existing community was never built and the promise of 1,000 jobs from industrial units didn't materialize either. Instead Brymbo went back to Wrexham council and insisted that, if it was to build the road, another parcel of land must get permission for housing.

Wrexham's dozy planners at last woke up and insisted that the housing development was conditional on building the road. The developers still said the housing must go up first. Stalemate.

Now that the housing market has collapsed, Brymbo has taken its well-worn begging bowl to the Welsh assembly and demanded money to build that elusive road. It says it will cost £2m – about one seventh of the dividends pocketed by Brymbo Developments' owners in just one year.

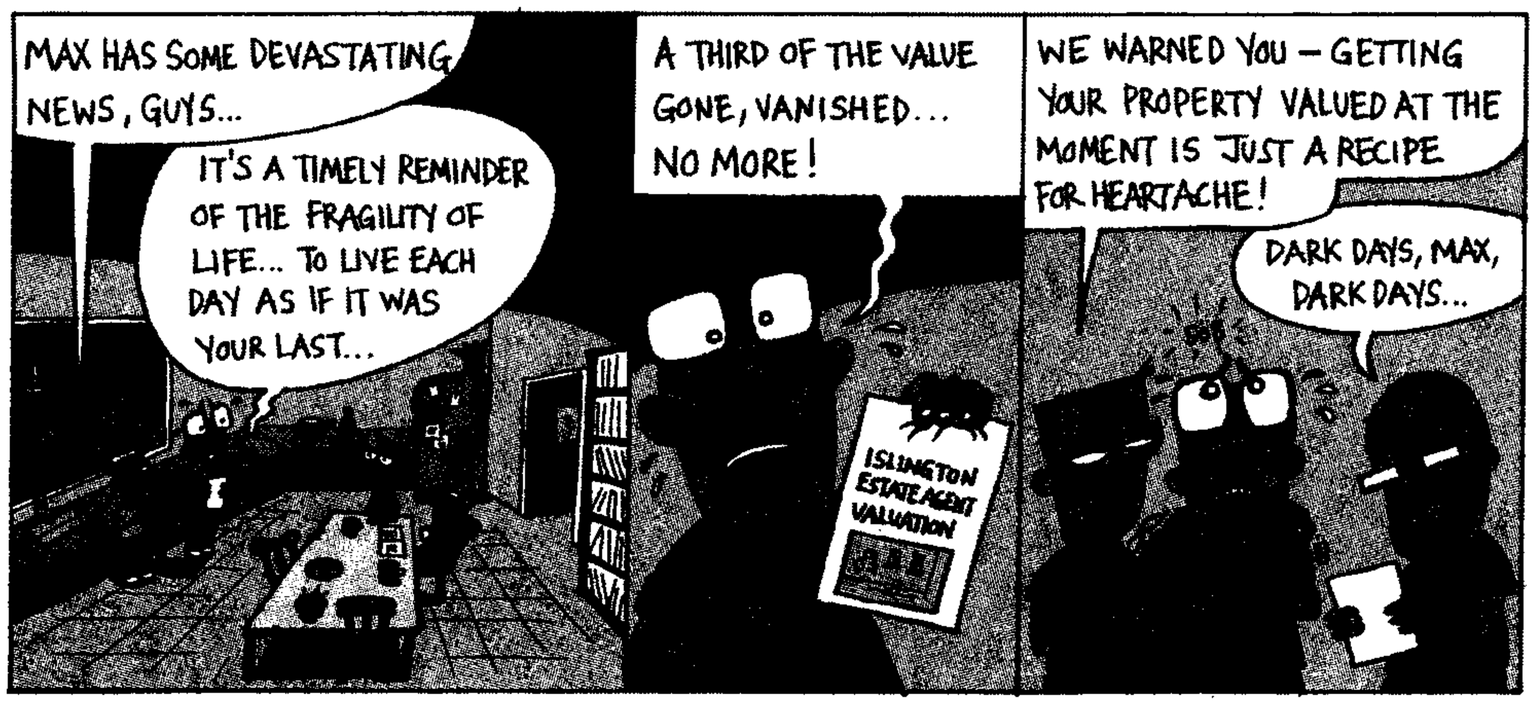
The company is a subsidiary of Grandkeep Ltd 2000, which in turn is wholly owned by parent company Parkhill 2000 Ltd, The dosh was paid to parent company Parkhill 2000, which is 90 percent owned by Colin Cornes of Shifnal, Shropshire, with the rest split between two other Shropshire lads, Niall Crabb and P J Smyth.

Model businessmen for our times!

● THANKS to (both) the readers who pointed out the typing error in *Eye* 1227 which rendered Bournemouth council's motto *Pulchritudo et Salubritas* ["beauty and health"] as "*pulchritido*" etc. Meanwhile the coat of arms page on Bournemouth's own website claims the word in question is "*pulchritsudo*" – a beautiful launderette, perhaps?

IT'S GRIM UP NORTH LONDON

KNIFE & PACKER

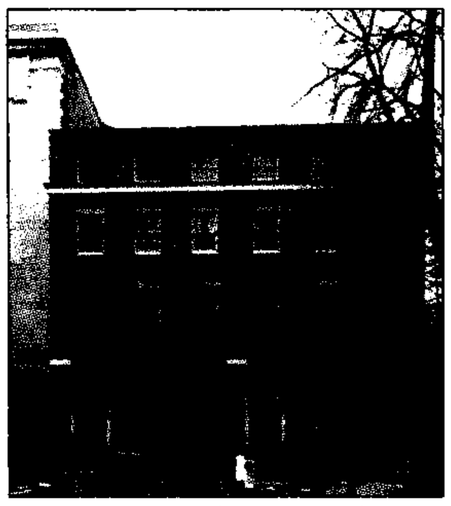

MAX HAS SOME DEVASTATING NEWS, GUYS...
IT'S A TIMELY REMINDER OF THE FRAGILITY OF LIFE... TO LIVE EACH DAY AS IF IT WAS YOUR LAST...
A THIRD OF THE VALUE GONE, VANISHED... NO MORE!
ISLINGTON ESTATE AGENT VALUATION
WE WARNED YOU – GETTING YOUR PROPERTY VALUED AT THE MOMENT IS JUST A RECIPE FOR HEARTACHE!
DARK DAYS, MAX, DARK DAYS...

NOOKS and CORNERS

IT'S undeniable the British Museum needs more space for exhibitions and conservation, especially as the institution has flourished and visitor numbers risen under director Neil MacGregor. And there is space at the north-west corner of the museum's site, behind the houses on the east side of Bedford Square. So far, so good.

Unfortunately, to design the new extension the museum has chosen Messrs Rogers Stirk Harbour & Partners, the new name of the firm of Milord Rogers. The firm proposes that the two replica Georgian houses in Montague Place – the northern boundary of the museum site – should be demolished, along with a Victorian building tucked behind, so its masterpiece is not hidden but can be fully enjoyed by the public.

Now these houses are interesting – and visually important. They were erected in 1980 to replace the last two surviving houses in Montague Place built by James Burton which had been wickedly demolished by the Museum on the grounds that they did not provide modern office accommodation. The Greater London Council's (late, lamented) historic buildings division and Camden council rightly insisted that replica facades went up instead to maintain the character of Georgian Bloomsbury. Well built and detailed, they stand next to Sir John Burnet's King Edward VII wing of the British Museum – arguably the finest Edwardian building in London – and terminate the view down Malet Street. There is no reason to suppose that a blank modernist façade by Rogers Stirk Harbour will be an improvement.



Why the British Museum went to an established modernist firm like Rogers' is baffling – you would have thought it had had enough trouble with Milord Foster's firm when the wrong stone was used for the Great Court (*Eyes passim*). The Rogers firm specialises in structures of steel and glass: fair enough; but it has no understanding of or sympathy for historic buildings of masonry construction like the British Museum.

English Heritage has objected to the plans, noting that no justification has been offered for the demolition of the three threatened buildings. Furthermore, both EH and the Georgian Group have concerns about the impact of the new extension on the lighting of and the view from Smirke's elegant Arched Room, as well as on Burnet's magnificent marble staircase. As the Georgian Group argues, the scheme "seriously detracts from the conservation area and the adjoining listed buildings".

The scheme should be rethought.

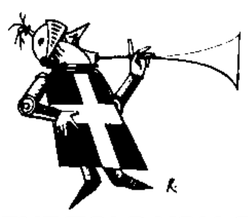
*NOT content with proposing to spoil Winckley Square with a gratuitous dollop of public money (*Eye *1222), Preston city council now wants to have a go at the Flag Market.*

This is all part of "Preston Vision", which is fuelled by the prospect of millions from the North West Development Agency and by the fact that Messrs John Lewis have said they will only move in to the new Tithebarn shopping centre if the public spaces in the city are "upgraded".

Now the Flag Market is the civic heart of Preston. A large, central market place, it is overlooked by the Edwardian Baroque County Sessions Hall and by the magnificent late Greek Revival Harris Library and Museum – and until 1948, when it was stupidly demolished after a fire, the Gothic Revival Town Hall by Gilbert Scott stood on one side.

To improve the setting of these buildings, a national design competition was organised by the council and the winner is Landscape Projects of Manchester. Its proposals include planting a ring of tall pigeon-friendly trees close around the Cenotaph designed by Sir Giles Scott and erecting a row of seven 17-metre high "electronic barriers" opposite the Harris Library.

Cllr Anthony Gornall, "cabinet member for environment and regeneration" – he who is so keen on titivating Winckley Square – commented: "After very careful consideration and public consultation we have chosen a design which will complement the historic nature of the Flag Market but will also improve the area as a whole". But the **Lancashire Evening Post** *has bothered to find out what members of the public actually think and found that a majority much preferred a more modest design entry which proposed larger flagstones and another monument. In other words, most people would like the Flag Market left alone and not filled with vulgar, obtrusive electronic junk.*



EYE TOLD YOU SO

WHEN I awarded the coveted Sir Hugh Casson Medal to "The Public" at West Bromwich, designed by Will Alsop and which cost taxpayers at least £61m, I predicted in *Eye* 1226 this new arts facility, which only opened last July, and in which the interactive digital gallery never worked and never opened, would soon close. And lo, it came to pass last week that Arts Council England has now axed its £500,000 revenue grant.

True, it has offered a one-off £3m to Sandwell council to keep the wretched thing open. But this is just throwing good money after bad and merely delays the inevitable.

Meanwhile the "iconic" 32-storey tower which featured here in *Eye* 1223 and which Gravesham council insisted was an essential part of the £150m scheme to "regenerate" poor old Gravesend's "Heritage Quarter", has now been abandoned. Hurrah!

'Piloti'

YOUNG BRITISH ARTISTS

BY BIRCH

The X-Factor is run by a Svengali-like control freak with a financial interest in the winners.
SAATCHI TO HOST ART X-FACTOR. SEARCH FOR THE NEW ARTISTS STARTS ON BBC2 LATER THIS YEAR. "SAATCHI'S BEST OF BRITISH"
There's no similarity at all!

Obamaballs

"Barack Obama has become the first African-American President this week, reminding us that with hard work and positive determination, dreams that once seemed unachievable can in fact become reality… If you feel you could make a difference in the marketing, advertising and design industries, start by searching madjobs, our industry specific job-hunting service." – ***madjobs.co.uk***

"I am Mark Saggers and this is the first 5Live Sport of the Barack Obama presidency." – ***BBC Radio 5 Live***

"Is Obama an Othello for our times? Reflecting on the excitement of the US presidential campaign, this seminar brings together artists, politicians and broadcasters to question the links between the journey of Barack Obama and the story of Othello." – ***Advert for event at Warwick Arts Centre***

"When President Obama spoke about the challenges that we face 'amidst gathering clouds and raging storms', his meaning was clear: 'the world has changed and we must change with it'… As you look at your PR in 2009, and ask how prepared your business is for change, what do you see?" – ***Circular from Kristin Sylteviik, MD of Hotwire PR***

"Oxford is playing a key role in a historical event today – as President-Elect Barack Obama takes the oath of office on a Bible published by Oxford University Press." – ***Press release from the University of Oxford***

"When Barack Obama steps out for his inauguration later tonight, a little piece of Australia will be on stage with him. His wife, Michelle, will be wearing an Australian-made daytime eye shadow." – **Today Tonight, *Channel 7, Australia***

"With all the hype today about the inauguration of the 44th US president Barack Obama, Gardenworks has decided it is time to help our industry spread some 'feel good' among UK consumers, said the garden centre consultancy's director John Connel. Gardenworks has developed a series of grow-your-own 'yes we can' workshops that can be run with garden centres throughout the year." – ***Trade mag* Horticulture Week**

"Another trend is towards a more beachy, relaxed feel, where coral will be a strong colour. 'This fits with the new President Obama and a feeling of change in the air,' Redshaw says. 'Indigo, sandy colours and mother of pearl are all strong looks teamed with natural woods.'" – **Independent *feature on home décor***

"On Friday night we saw a Jonathan Ross who has clearly grown up and put away childish things, which was not only an essential career move but, post-inauguration, also a zeitgeistily fashionable nod to Obama." – ***Kathryn Flett*, Observer**

"As a Leo, President Obama's high standards and complete professionalism won't stand for being treated with contempt or ridicule, but they are very aware of other people's need for dignity, so his relationship with Brown should be interesting as Brown, a Piscean on the cusp of Aries, has a tendency to be hot-tempered, impetuous and impatient. " – ***Press release from GaneshaSpeaks, "one of the leading astrological services of the world"***

"[Bryan] Gunn and America's 44th presidential incumbent have one thing in common. Both have to build bridges… " – ***Paddy Davitt welcomes the new Norwich City manager*, Eastern Daily Press**

"Oh… Oh… Oh… Obama: New hope for the future of Orgasms! Rampant Rabbit Wave, exclusive to Ann Summers. 'Yes we can' – orgasms in under 60 seconds. 'Change you can believe in' – Now £10 off!" – ***Ann Summers promotion***

Letters

No you can't

Sir,

I have been subscribed to Private Eye for just over one year. I thought I had become immune to the acerbic nature of the Eye, with an occasional laugh at a cartoon, but I feel that the over of edition 1228 just went to new depths. I do not think that the ultra-new President of America merited that treatment – yet!

Please cancel my subscription forthwith.

RONALD O'REILLY,

Alloa.

Welcome to Israel

Sir,

Your Hunter cartoon and Number Crunching (Letters Page, 1228) is not only tasteless but inciteful by making Israel out to be the strong bully fighting the weak.

The sign should read "Shalom, Welcome to Israel, Land of Peace. When you hear the sirens please make yourself aware of the nearest shelter. You will have 15 seconds to run for cover when a rocket is on its way from Gaza."

And that is why fewer Israelis have been killed that Gazans, because they protect their citizens as best as they can whereas Hamas cowards use their citizens, particularly children, as a "human shield" to defend them.

Israel has been targeting Hamas rocket launch sites and arsenals. Why do you not criticise them for placing these in mosques, schools, playgrounds etc specifically so that children will be killed in the retaliation?

So let's see a cartoon that at least shows the truth of the matter rather than the misguided falsehoods.

DAVID COLE.

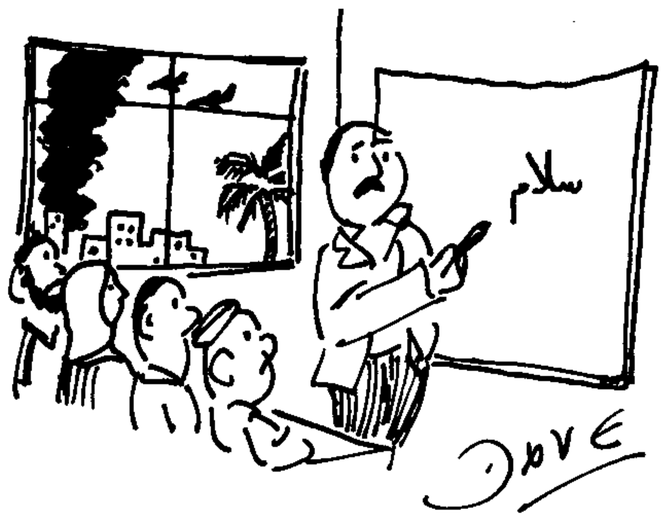
Via email.

Sir,

I hope I am alone in suspecting that the Hunter cartoon (issue 1228 "Welcome to Israel: 100 eyes for an eye") crossed over the green line between criticism of Israel and slipped into the territory of anti-Jewishness. It takes an innocent to do so unawares, but unfortunately the less innocent may quickly feel they are permitted to follow. The talion law (an eye for an eye, etc) was for a long time held to typify Jewish teaching and was contrasted with nonresistance and forgiveness. Fortunately clerics and theologians have for some time abandoned such partial and tendentious polemics, but that is just the battleground the cartoon seems to me to have strayed into. By all means criticise Israeli military strategy if you must, but don't, please take a swipe at Judaism on the way.

Yours,
(RABBI) TONY HAMMOND,

South London.



"In Arabic we greet a stranger with 'Peace Be With You' – it's the same in Hebrew"

Sir,

*I always enjoy your number-crunching. But there is more to life than numbers. According to a report in **Corriere della Sera** a doctor in the Schifa Hospital in Gaza has said the number of Palestinians killed was between 500 and 600, "the majority of them youths between 17 and 23 who had been recruited by the Hamas". But Hamas had then deliberately manipulated the figures, and various organisations such as the Red Cross fell for the larger number. And the whole problem of terrorist organisations is that it is not always possible to define a difference between "civilians" and "armed fighters" – this is not a new problem, but it was noticeable during the reporting of the campaign that the press also made no such distinction and referred just to "Palestinians". And when even Al-Arabiya TV shows video proving that rockets being fired out of the Press Centre, one should learn not to believe everything that is broadcast about atrocities and unwarranted targeting of innocent buildings.*

Who is right? I don't know. And death is never anything to laugh about. Especially of the innocents.

WALTER ROTHSCHILD,

Berlin, Germany.

Lookalike

Murray

Werewolf

Sir,

I hope your readers will join me in demanding an unreserved apology from the ATP for such insensitive scheduling of Andy Murray's fourth-round tie. Playing late at night under a full moon obviously affected him adversely...

MAX PETROKOFSKY,

Via email.

Cheap shot?

Sir,

A bit of a cheap shot I thought to stick poor old Grahame Nix (25 years of service with his employers – I looked it up, did you?) of Marshall Aerospace amongst your questionable New Year's Honours recipients (Eye 1227)!

*Firstly I'm no expert but I'd hazard a guess that "military aeroplane maker Marshall Aerospace" has never actually **made** a single plane in its distinguished history. Admittedly they've repaired and refurbished thousands including Hercules transporters which are vital to the British Armed Forces support services. I can also tell you this famous and entrepreneurial British family business is about to celebrate its centenary and can boast having trained more Spitfire pilots during the Second World War than the RAF.*

I know all this not because I work there (I don't) but because like many people in the area I see our local paper full of the charity work that this large and prestigious local employer does in its community. Can I assume all your other entries are similarly well-researched?

Regards,
JOHN CRAIG,

Cambridge.

Plucking hell

Sir,

Full marks to Private Eye for, as always, exposing lies, hypocrisy and corruption in its Street of Shame column in the edition of 23 January. It was particularly shocking to read about the goings on at The Independent, my old paper. Except your account of nepotism isn't correct. Simon Kelner did not pluck his nephew, Adam Leigh, from a lowly subbing job on the Birmingham Post and fast-track him to be news editor of first the Independent on Sunday and then the Independent.

Adam Leigh moved from the Post, where he'd been news editor for three years, to the Indie, where he was appointed to the subbing team, long before Uncle Simon became editor. It was there that I worked with Adam during a brief stint as features editor of the Indie. When I was appointed assistant editor of the Indie on Sunday and was asked by the then editor, Kim Fletcher, to help him find a suitable candidate to be made news editor, I suggested Adam.

We informed Simon Kelner out of courtesy of our decision but it was already a done deal.

Shame it's such a boring story, compared to your account of favouritism, but at least it has the virtue of being true.

CATHERINE PEPINSTER,

Editor, The Tablet.

A resigning matter

Sir,

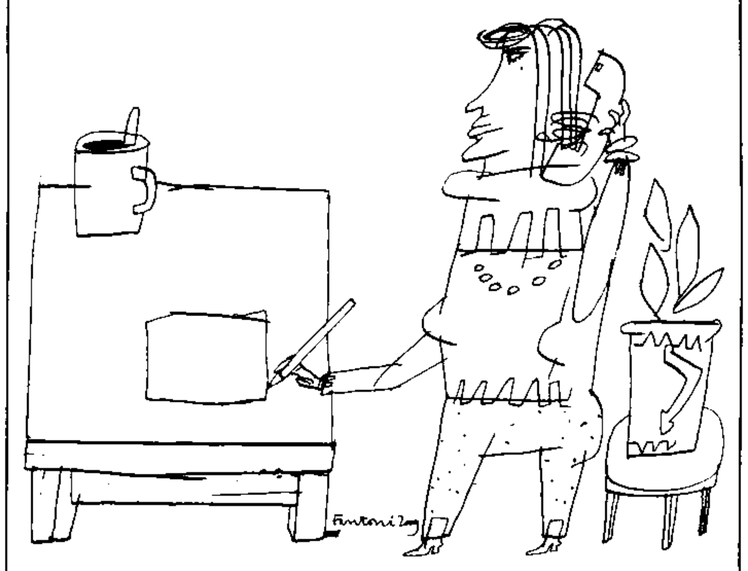
I became quite misty-eyed to see my name in your current issue on Page 6 in Hackwatch (Own Goals and Golden Ducks). It was a nostalgic reminder of my days in journalism when frequently my concern was that my name did not appear in Private Eye.

However there is a slight inaccuracy in that I wasn't "shown the door". I left the building unaided and at a time entirely of my own choosing – an unusual state of affairs with the Telegraph I know, but that's how it was.

Regards,
JON RYAN

Director of Communications, British Horseracing Authority.

Scenes You Seldom See



"... or you can call my mobile. I'll say the number very, very slowly – and then repeat it. It's 07779..."

"What exactly is the latest on the assisted suicide debate?"

Lookalike

Sontaran

George

Sir,

I was struck by the similarity of disgraced DJ Boy George and this inter-galactic baddie – a Sontaran – from the Dr Who series.

Perhaps, upon his release, BJ could do a screen test as one of them? I mean, the make-up department wouldn't have to do much!

Yours,
DONNY COUTTS,

Via email.

Well read

Sir,

Eye 1227's Number Crunching on page 25 states that there has only ever been one positive review in the Literary Review pages.

But what about a review of William Shatner's "Another Re-Entry" in Eye 1211 ("of several memoirs recently published [...] this is the only one anyone need read."), or even Sebastian Faulkes's "Devil May Care" in Eye 1212 ("it's actually rather good [...] so he'll probably get asked to do it again")?

Regards,
MICHAEL PATEREK,

Via email.

Lost at sea

Sir,

While I am pleased that you reported the UK government's misguided dithering over the building of a much needed airport on St Helena (In The Back, Eye 1227), I note that the accompanying photo shows St Helena Island in the Straits of Mackinac, Michigan, USA, rather than the island in the South Atlantic.

ALEXANDER SCHULENBURG,

Via email.

Tilts at Wilts

Sir,

*I must inform Wiltshire and it's Taxi Drivers Club, "bless um" (Rotten Boroughs, Eye 1228) NVQ has and always will be, **Not Very Quick**. As in "Taxi".*

Must run now,
F. DODGER.

Via email.

"Have you any idea what that was doing to the environment?"

Pedantry Corner

... There's no "i" in "Ordnance" and these days, there's no "f" in credit.

PHIL SAUNDERS.

... In Eye 1228 (p3) you report that the Ordinance Survey is being considered for "alternatives to public ownership". That news doesn't bother me, but I hope they leave the Ordnance Survey alone.

MICHAEL WASLEY.

... Can I be the first of the 13,264 correspondents to point out that the cuckoo clock originated in south-west Germany and its manufacture later became established in the Black Forest, not Switzerland (cartoon, p. 14, Eye 1228)?

The first Black Forest cuckoo clocks were created between 1740 and 1750 although in 1629, decades before clock making was established in the Black Forest, an Augsburg nobleman – Philipp Hainhofer (1578-1647) – gave the first known description of a cuckoo clock which belonged to Prince Flector August von Sachsen.

ROGER CROSTON.

... Graham R Ritchie's pedantry (Pedantry Corner, Eye 1228) is to be commended but is sadly misinformed. CBE stands for Commander of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire.

WILL ADAM.

*... I am pleased to see Piloti has raised the scandalous state of Temple Mill in Leeds (Nooks and Corners, Eye 1228). But architect **James** Bonomi??? Shome mistake, surely? It was **Joseph** Bonomi, Jr. The poor man! Never has an architect been so done down – it is bad enough that this building is regularly attributed to his father (Joseph Snr) or his brother (Ignatius) but Piloti ought to know! But please keep up the pressure.*

SUSAN KELLERMAN.

Ms Scott (Letters, 1228) – 'bale' is a perfectly correct alternative to 'bail'. You will find a dictionary in the school library. I advise you to use it to avoid further blunders.

DR SMART ALEC.

... In your latest edition (Colemanballs, Eye 1227), you included Ronnie O'Sullivan for ridicule. In case The Rocket does not subscribe to your organ or is disinclined to defend himself, I propose to do it for him. In my opinion, his use of the word "result" ("At this stage of my career, I regard any win as a result"), is correct. He is using "result" to mean an unanticipated or unpredicted event to be greeted with surprise and delight, rather than simply the outcome of a contest.

ED STOPPARD.

... Mike Barfield's otherwise excellent cartoon "Bringing home the bacon" contains a common error, referring as it does to the "Gloucester Old Spot". As I am sure Jamie Oliver could tell him, the correct name of the breed is "Gloucester Old Spots", as the breed requirement is for one or more distinct spots. I could go on about the Saddleback drawn with prick ears instead of lop ears but I really need to get out.

ANDREW BRADLEY.

Colemanballs

£10 paid for contributions

"The Lib Dem leader has been literally squashed by the First Minister [Alex Salmond]."
KIT FRASER, BBC Scotland
(Angus MacTavish)

"Brian Moore got [drug] tested after every single game in the World Cup and it got up his nose..."
JEREMY GUSCOTT, Radio 5 Live
(David Simpson)

"Very unusually, it has turned noon here in Washington."
HUW EDWARDS
(Sam Tazzyman)

"When you've got a mountain to climb you may as well throw everything into the kitchen sink straight away."
DAVID PLATT
(Stuart Miller)

"It went global and then it went round the world..."
Two-Tone music fan, BBC Midlands Today
(M. Cooper)

Pseudo-names

... Sad to see the apparent demise of the splendidly imaginative made-up names.

What can I say?

SHAMUS O'LOHVER.

... How dare you stop this popular feature? It was the first thing I turned to when the Eye landed on my doormat. If you don't re-instate it, you can expect a letter from my solicitors, Carter Fuck.

YUL. B. SORRY.

... Much as we sympathise with your decision to curtail the Pseudo Names correspondence, we can't help feeling that such an explosion of joyous response from your readership might prompt you to stick with it for a while longer.

PERCY VERE THEROUX
HELEN HIGHWATER.

... This has to stop. I have cancelled my subscription and won't renew until this ends, once and for all.

ALF WIEDERSEHEN.

...Couldn't your long-running photo show someone in something other than a scruffy vest – and as for the pseudo names, that's gone on for too long.

NATALIE DREST.

... Despite calling time on pseudonymous correspondence, we predict that it will run and run all year.

In anticipation we would like to wish your readers a White Christmas 2009.

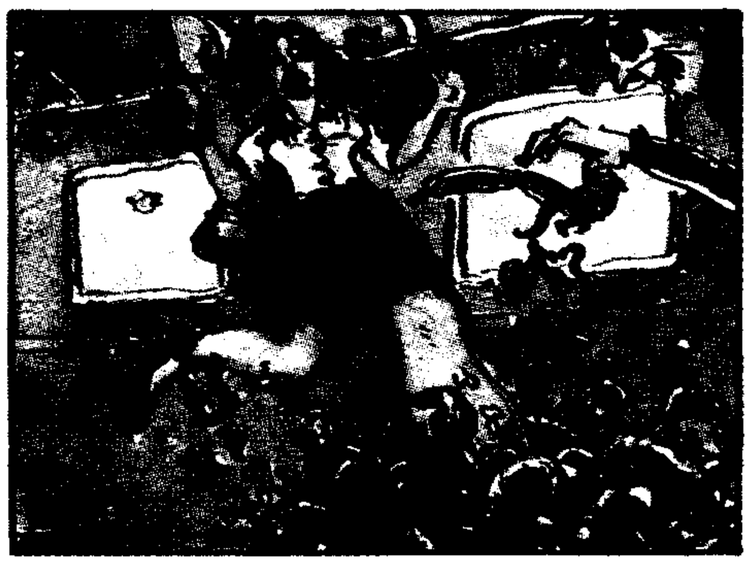
MAJOR DAYS-BEE
MARY ANN BRIGHT
ANN MAY HALL
YORK RHYS
MRS B. WHITE.

FUNNY OLD WORLD

COMPILED BY **VICTOR LEWIS-SMITH**

"We'd been on the lookout for this man for some time," a police spokesman told a press conference in Osaka prefecture, Tokyo, "and our officers were regularly patrolling the Keihan line. Over the past month, eighteen cases had been reported to us of disgusting worms being released on express trains, and the circumstances were always the same. The man would get close to a woman on the train, any woman, then open a plastic container and pour hundreds of disgusting worms at her feet. When he was finally arrested earlier today by a patrolling officer, the only explanation he would give us was 'I wanted to see the women get scared and shake their legs'."

The spokesman was commenting on the arrest of 35-year-old Manabu Mizuta, who was caught in the act of emptying a container



holding 200 worms onto the floor of a train compartment, at the feet of a female passenger. "He had ten clear plastic containers in his backpack when he was detained, which we estimate to contain about 3,600 worms, although we cannot count them precisely, because there are so many. We have the disgusting worms sitting inside the police station right now. You can see them wriggling inside their clear cases. It made one of our members vomit. We assume Mizuta derived sexual pleasure from trying to frighten female passengers, but the ones we've spoken to weren't remotely scared, just disgusted." *(Borneo Star, 26/1/08. Spotter: John Tresidder)*

"I have never seen anything like it," Karen Hargreaves of the Splendid Pets and Exotics shop in Eccleston told reporters. "Mrs Moreland came in, screaming obscenities and being extremely threatening, just because her tortoise had died. She was telling customers not to buy any of our animals, because they were diseased, so I told her to take it to the vet for a post mortem, but that just made her angrier. We pride ourselves on the welfare of our pets, and have never had any trouble like this before. She even started banging on the window and disturbing two of our lizards. It was terrible."

Following the disturbance, police were called to the shop, but Caroline Moorland was unrepentant. "My little girl Jessica loved that tortoise, and was absolutely devastated. They told me it would live for 100 years, but I found it dead on Monday, only six weeks after I'd I paid £300 for it. I admit arguing with the owner, but we were so disappointed and shocked, and I cannot believe they told me to take the tortoise to the vet and pay for a post mortem. We feel really let down by the pet shop."

Trading standards are now investigating the death. (St Helens Reporter, 2/7/08. Spotter: Catherine Mooney)

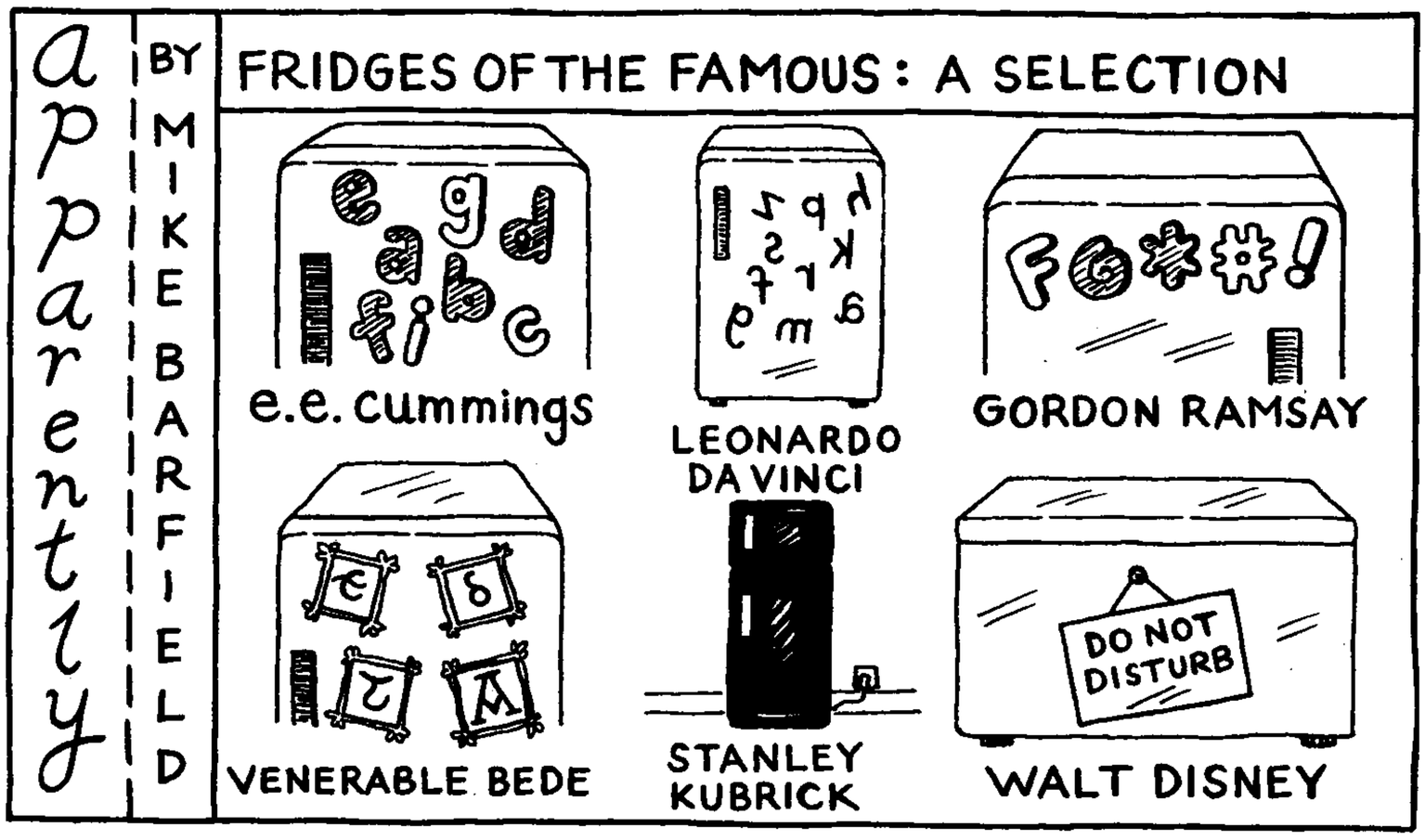
– o –

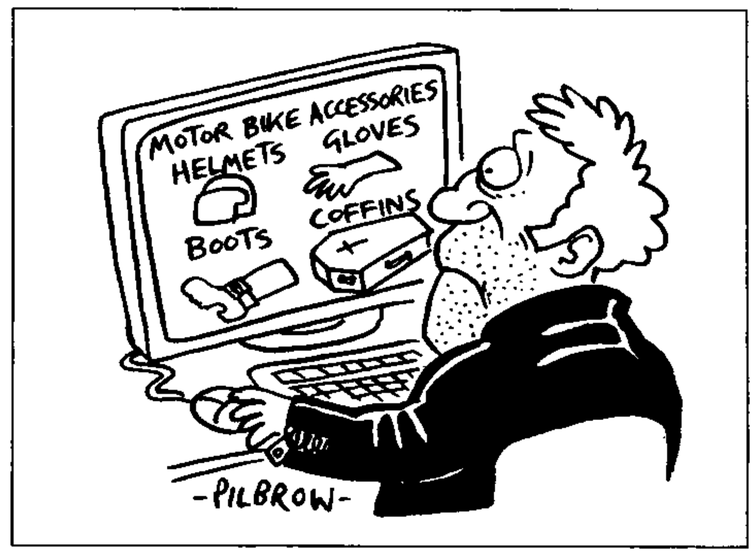
Festival international du livre mangeable.
The International Edible Book Festival is a yearly event devoted to bibliophagy, and is celebrated throughout the world. This event unites book artists, food lovers, and bibliophiles to celebrate the ingestion of culture and its fulfilling nourishment. Participants create edible books that are photographed, exhibited, then consumed. The only rule for participants is to make edible art that relates to books, in text, shape, or content. All artworks are consumed on the day of the event.

The *Festival international du livre mangeable* is the creation of Judith A Hoffberg and Beatrice Coron, who also created the Books2Eat.com website. Images of all edible books are displayed on this site so, despite the distances, everybody can enjoy the creations worldwide. All participants must register on the web site, and immortalise their creation by posting an image, thereby creating an ephemeral global banquet of literature.

Festivals are held annually in over 20 countries, from France and Canada to Hong Kong and Brazil. All national festivals must be held on or around April 1st, which is the birthday of Jean-Anthelme Brillat-Savarin, the French gastronome famous for his meditation on food, *Physiologie du gout.*

As Sir Francis Bacon once observed, "Some books are to be tasted, others to be swallowed, and some few to be chewed and digested." *(Books2Eat website. Spotter: Peter Owen)*





From The Message Boards

Members of the online community respond to the major issues of the day...

Gay penguins wed

rememb-er the school band the book with the gay pengin's bring-ing up the baby pengin. wel now the reel life gay pengin's in the zoo got marry-ed an they give them the abandend baby pengin's 2 bring up "LIKE" husban an wife ☹ now the social service's give orfan's to a gay couple insted of granparent's ● then the indi-en lady give birth to a octapus is nothing natral no mor – ***Darling_Deneyze***

My children saw the travel guide with the paedophile dressed as the Fat Controller from Thomas the Tank Engine. "The nice man is patting Thomas," said one. They are too young to understand, so I had to explain that he wasn't nice at all. Now they have nightmares. But what if they were adopted by gays? They would tell them the man was being friendly, leaving them none the wiser. I find this very worrying. – ***Emily***

Any gays human or penguin come near my girls I swear Ill do time – ***Family_Man***

Heaviest drinkers are middle class

Yobs killing man for refusing to hand over a bottle of wine? Or New Labour's health police making an official confiscation? – ***Brown_out***

At the risk of blowing my own trumpet (not a criminal offence – yet!) my new pamphlet promotes the positive side of "middle class" drinking. It responds to the proposal to print calorie counts on alcoholic beverages, thus dissuading figure-conscious youth from "binge drinking". (A lager is thus equivalent to a slice of pizza, an "alcopop" the same as a burger, etc.)

My guide, by contrast, emphasises the relatively low calorie content of alcohol, and use more suitable illustrations. (The basic types of sherry, for example, are compared to kedgeree, devilled kidneys, and potted shrimps.)

By the way, thank you to all those who sent messages of support during my court case. The magistrate accepted that my giant finger costume symbolised the wagging finger of the nanny state, and not the unsavoury appendage the police and "media" alleged it to be. – ***Edwin***

edwin, ur bak! lovin it bruv wantin 2 try this shrimp weed – ***Zaks_bak***

WHITE HELL BLITZES BLIZZARD BRITAIN

What You Missed (All Channels)

John *(or it may be Eamonn)*: The time's coming up to 7.42 and there are reports of severe weather conditions all over Britain. So over to Denise at the Weather Centre...

Denise *(for it is she)*: The Met Office has issued a severe snow event warning for all parts of Britain and travellers are advised to stay at home unless your journey is absolutely necessary. Back to you now, John.

John: Thank you, Denise. So, the message from the Met Office warns of a severe snow event. And their advice is that, unless your journey is absolutely necessary, you should stay at home. And now over to the Travel Centre for an update on Britain's roads.

Andy Divot, Roads Spokesman

Divot: Well, John, I'm not at the Travel Centre because I've heeded the snow event warnings on the news and I've stayed at home. And here in Chipping Norton where I live it's quite pleasant, actually, and if I look out of the window, I can just see the traffic moving quite freely on the A40, but my wife's just told me she's heard on the radio that there's severe disruption on the railways due to the snow event.

John: Thanks, Andy. And we'll come back to you later when, hopefully, there'll be a serious snow event in your part of the world. And, unfortunately, we can't give you an update on rail travel because the website's crashed due to excessive demand. But we've just had this text from Vince, a container lorry driver between junctions 26 and 27 on the M25, and he tells us that the traffic flow is unusually good due to everybody heeding the warning to stay at home. Thank you, Vince. And keep those texts and emails coming in. And the time's coming up to to 7.52 and if you've been wondering how Britain's otters cope with something like a major snow event, here in the studio we have global warming guru Professor Barkworth whose book *'The Snow Otter'* has just been published. Professor, could I start by asking you how you got in today.

Barkworth: Well, it was quite easy really *(cont. Channel 94)*

MICHAEL PHELPS – MY SHAME

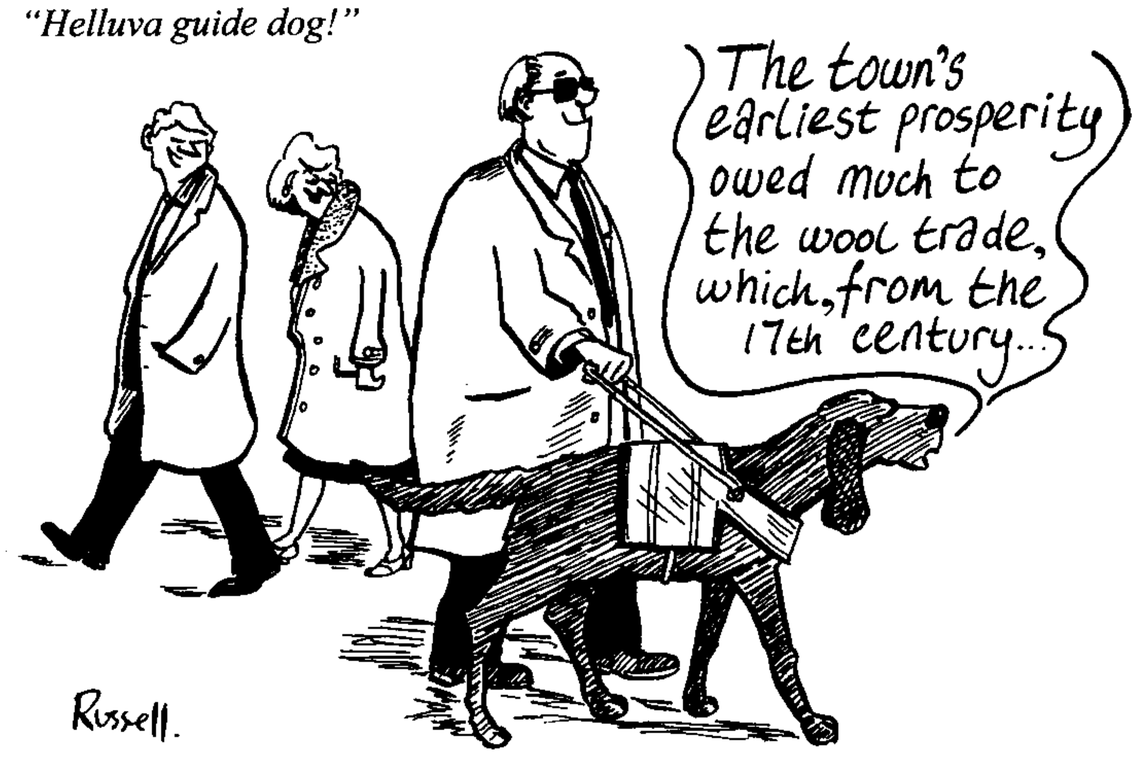
by Our Recreational Drugs Correspondent **Phil Bong**

A TEARFUL Michael Phelps yesterday apologised to the world for what he described as "a moment of madness".

The apology follows the publication of a picture in which he can be clearly seen taking "a dip". "I have let down my loyal fans in the drug world," he said.

"It's all too easy to get hooked on swimming. In my own case, I stuck my toe in the water and the next thing I knew I was on eight medals a Games. Let this be a warning to young drug smokers everywhere."

"Helluva guide dog!"



GLENDA SLAGG

Fleet Street's Snow Queen!?!

■ **HATS OFF to David Blunkett, who's tying the knot again at the ripe old age of *[Subs: Please fill in].* After all life's disappointments – and, let's be frank, David's had his fair share – it gives you a warm glow to hear that Cupid's arrow has struck him right in the middle of his bigger-than-big heart!?!!! The years of heartbreak are over. It's been love-on-the-rocks for too long. Call me a corny old sentimentalist if you like but there's a little tear a-tricklin' and a-ticklin' down my cheek. All together – aaaaah!?!**

■ DAVID BLUNKETT!?! What a disgrace!?! What's his faithful guide dog done to be dumped in favour of a fortune-seeking floozie?!? What a way to treat your best friend!?! You must have a heart of stone, two-timing Dave – as well as a manky old beard!?! Shame on you!! How dare you get married?!? Why don't you go back to hanging around nightclubs asking other people's wives to have your babies!?! (Is this right? Ed.)

■ *HERE THEY ARE – Glenda's Fancy Firelighters To Warm Your Cockles.*

● **Lord Truscott.** I've got a nice Second Chamber you can come into, Big Boy (geddit?!)!!!?

● **Lord Snape.** I've heard you like fat cheques. Howsabout a fat chick for a change!?!

● **Lord Turner.** They say you're crooked – but I'll soon straighten you out!?!!

Byeee!!

POETRY CORNER

In Memoriam Bill Frindall, Bearded Wonder And Cricket Statistician

So. Farewell
Then Bill
Frindall.

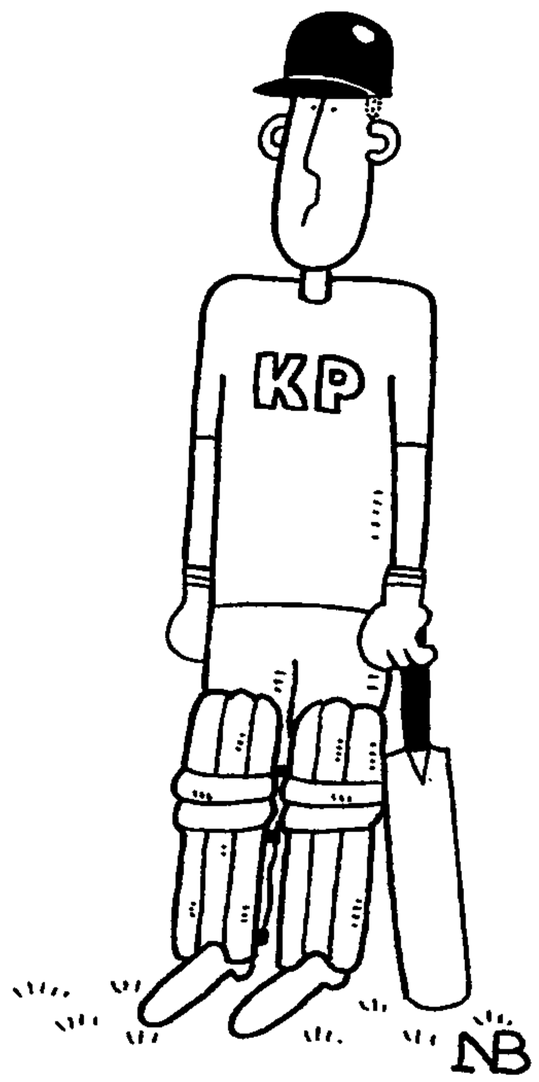
Famous cricket
Scorer.

Now the Great
Scorer has
Declared your
Innings closed

For 69.

A good
Knock.

E.J. Thribb (17½)



Dumbslog Millionaire

PRIME MINISTERIAL DECREE NO. 37

From the Desk of the Supreme Leader

Comrades,

As you will be aware, almost the first thing that Comrade President Obama did after entering the White House was to ring me up.

We spoke at length for well over three minutes, during which time we covered a wide range of issues. These included global warming, Gaza, Guantanamo Bay, health insurance, Iraq, Iran, the future of the car industry, the measures needed to save the world's banking system and the type of puppy appropriate to be presented to his daughters.

On all these issues, the new President was naturally eager to have my advice, which I was happy to give him.

As you can see, this historic reaffirmation of the special relationship between myself and the US President puts into perspective the absurd claims by certain European leaders, such as Comrade Sarkozy, that he had spoken to Comrade President Obama for 27 minutes longer than your Supreme Leader.

Comrade Sarkozy had the audacity to suggest that this indicated that he was Comrade Obama's favourite supreme leader.

This is transparent nonsense. The length of the Sarkozy-Obama telephone call can very simply be explained by the obvious fact that Comrade Sarkozy does not speak English, and that it must have taken him half an hour just to explain to Comrade Obama who on earth he was.

Meanwhile, I have had much more important things to concern me than the question of how to help the Americans out of the world financial crisis that they alone were responsible for in the first place.

To that end, I was invited to address hundreds of world leaders in Davos, and to explain to them how I saved the world from financial ruin.

I was able to set out to them how I now have an even more brilliant plan to save the world again, by launching my Global Vision For A New World Order, implementing the principles of Brownite-Neo-Keynesian-Bail-Outism on a global scale.

Clearly this is very complicated, and Comrades may find it difficult to understand.

But essentially what it involves is every country in the world joining together to borrow trillions of dollars which they will then spend on the measures urgently required to remedy the problems caused by borrowing too much money.

Who could possibly think that my plan is complicated, when obviously nothing could be simpler!

Naturally, my audience received my three-hour speech in a stunned silence, many of them closing their eyes in order to concentrate even harder on the historical importance of what I was saying.

In this and every other respect, the British people can be proud of the fact that under the guidance of their Supreme Leader, our country is leading the way in these difficult times.

No less an authority than the International Monetary Fund has said that Britain's recession will be bigger and better than everyone else's!

Yours,

Gordon Brown

Supreme Leader

■ *Now available to all Comrades is the latest collection of the thoughts of our Supreme Leader, entitled "Green Shoots, Eats and Leaves" (£19.99 or €1)*

Enemies of the State No. 1

Lords Taylor, Truscott, Snape and Moonie

These shameless, back-sliding saboteurs and wreckers, in their reckless pursuit of financial gain, have attempted to bring the People's Party into disrepute and to blacken its name in the eyes of all Comrades. But they have failed, because we all recall who appointed them, these dismal, parasitical nonentities in their moth-eaten ermine robes and pathetic moustaches. Yes, it was the discredited former leader, ex-Comrade Blair, who, along with his accomplice, the hated Madame Blair, ruthlessly promoted a culture of unrestrained capitalist greed and "I'm alright, Jack-ism", thus encouraging his weaker-minded toadies to emulate his example by indulging in self-serving financial adventurism of their own.

Enemies of the State No. 2

Sir Fred Goodwin disgraced former Chairman of the People's Royal Bank of Scotland

It has been correctly stated that Comrade Sir Fred Goodwin acted for many years as one of my closest advisers on financial matters.

I would now like to make it clear that on no occasion did I listen to his advice because, had I done so, given Sir Fred's infantile and foolish views, the country would now be facing financial ruin.

Comrade Sir Fred should be stripped of all those State honours which were heaped upon him, not by myself, I hasten to add, but by the discredited former leader, ex-Comrade Blair.

CAMERON PICKS TV'S VORDERMAN

by Our Maths Correspondent **Al Gebra**

TV's former Countdown celebrity, Carol Vorderman, has been asked by Tory leader David Cameron to advise on new strategies to improve the popularity of an unappealing subject.

Said an enthusiastic Carol, "It's a great and exciting challenge. Most kids think the Tory Party is dull and doesn't add up. It is up to me to make it more fun – and, dare I say it, give it sex appeal."

Ms Vorderman is 36-24-36.

SLEAZE LATEST

Money-saving Recession Tips

JUST like gas or electricity suppliers, it's important you always shop around for the best peer to undermine legislation which you don't want to see enacted onto the statute books.

The bill for stopping a piece of legislation can vary widely, from as little as £25,000 to as much as £100,000.

Check with price comparison websites such as MoneySupermarket-Lords.com for the very best deals on offer, before approaching any peer.

Always remember to haggle. In a recession cash is king and some Lords will cut their fee by half for a well-stuffed brown envelope passed under the table in the Lords tearoom.

LORDS 'CASH FOR INFLUENCE' SCANDAL

by Our Political Staff **Lunchtime O'Sleaze**

A PROMINENT member of the House of Lords, Lord Gnome, today angrily denied that he had been prepared to change the laws of the land on behalf of a lobbying organisation.

Gnome was one of a number of peers targeted by journalists from a Sunday newspaper who had posed as businessmen wanting to buy "influence" in the House of Lords.

The journalists taped Lord Gnome in a three-hour conversation in the House of Lords bar, the highlights of which we reproduce below.

But yesterday, faced with the evidence of the tapes, Lord Gnome angrily denied that he had done anything wrong. He claimed that his recorded words had been taken out of context and misquoted to make it look as if he was "some kind of a sleazy crook who was up to no good."

THAT GNOME TAPE IN FULL

Journalist: So you can get the law changed, can you?

Gnome: I don't want to boast, but I have a lot of influence around this place and, if I have a couple of words with the right people, you can be sure that we'll get the result you want. Wheels within wheels, old boy!

Journalist: So how much do you want?

Gnome: Money is not important to me. This is a matter of great national importance. What was it about again? Anyway, no matter. But were you to mention the sum of, say, £1 million, you would be about in the right area. I do a lot of this sort of work. I've been around this place for a long time.

Journalist: So let's be clear about this, and can you speak a little bit closer to my tie? We give you the cash and you get the law changed the way we want. Is that right?

Gnome: Absolutely, my friend. That's what I'm here for. So why don't we celebrate by you chaps buying me lunch? The Caprice is awfully good these days...

THE SUNDAY TIMES

Revealed: Labour lords change laws for cash

Women losing jobs twice as fast as men

The latest hot phone is a BarackBerry

Harry and Chelsy split

Sunday Times Has Story Shock

by Our Insight Team PHIL PAGES

THE House of Lords was reeling last night with the sensational revelation that the Sunday Times had a story.

"And even more incredible," said an ashen-faced peer, Lord Luvaduck. "it's true. And it has been picked up by the other papers."

Said another distressed member of the Upper House, Lord Helpus, "This could turn the whole world of Sunday newspaper journalism upside down. If the Sunday Times is going to start running front-page scoops that don't fall apart by Tuesday, then we have got to question everything we think we know about how the system works."

● Newspaper "can be bought" for £2 claims undercover peer **2**

● Huge graphic illustrating how the newspaper came to have a story **3**

● Timetable of shame – the dramatic hours leading up to the Sunday Times putting in a story *(We get the idea. Ed.)*

YES, HE'S BACK – AND BOLDER THAN EVER!

That Jonathan Ross/Tom Cruise Interview In Full

(Studio band "Four Poofs and a Piano" sing "Wossy's Back In Town", as Ross bounds onto stage. Hysterical applause as studio audience see themselves on TV monitors)

Jonathan Ross *(for it is he)*: Thank you, thank you, thank you! I'd just like to start by apologising... for this show. No, but sewiously – tonight we have the very gweat honour to welcome one of the vewy gweatest human beings of all time – the movie stars' movie star – none other than Mr Tom Cwuise.

(Hysterical applause as beaming Scientologist climbs out of space ship and walks onto set)

Ross: Welcome! Tom, you're twuly fantastic in your new film, as you have been in all your other films. Tom, I have the feeling that you're the sort of person who, when he sets out to do something, he weally does it.

Cruise *(nodding and smiling)*: Yeah, I guess so.

(More hysterical applause from audience, as the "Four Poofs" dance around the piano in ecstasy)

Ross: I mean, you're the sort of person who, if I ask you a question, you'll weally focus on answering it.

Cruise: Yeah, that's right.

Ross: Now, this amazing new film of yours "Valkyrie" is about Hitler, and what everyone wants to know is – did the Führer fart in the bunker?

(Audience explodes with hysterical laughter at Wossy's cutting-edge wit. All four Poofs carried out on piano lid after fainting with amusement)

Cruise: Well, hey, I guess I just don't know. But he was certainly one helluva guy!

Ross: Tom Cwuise, it's been a pwivilege and honour to have you on the pwogwamme.

(More hysterical applause from audience, as the legendary star re-enters spaceship and flies back to scientology conference in East Grinstead. [Surely the planet Theta? Ed]*)*

Nice Work If You Can Get It

No.1 Cloakroom attendant in the North-East of England

THE Sun

Friday, February 6, 2009

● There's more bum in the Sun!
● Read all about tit!

U.S. KING OF SEX IS DEAD

by Our Literary Staff
PHIL CONDOM

AMERICA's uncrowned "King of Sex", writer John Updike, has died at the age of 69 (surely '76'? Ed).

For 40 years his books sold in their millions, thanks to their steamy cocktail of sex and more sex in suburban small-town America.

Rabbit Blue

From the 1950s on, Updike broke down the bedroom door of prim and proper America and described in lurid and explicit detail who was doing what to whom.

Swinging... love-romps... suspenders... orgies... adultery... wife-swapping... everyone at it like rabbits... Upskirt's pen sketched all these raunchy scenes of everyday middle-class American life as no one had ever done before.

With such unforgettable sentences as "Rabbit's hot trembling fingers ripped the thin silk from her *(Cont. p. 94)*.

One, two, three, PHWOAR! Updike's unforgettable three-in-a-bed Satanic romp in *Witches Of Eastwick* rocketed Jack Nicholson to stardom

Dave Snooty AND HIS PALS

IT'S A FULL SCALE DEPRESSION!
BUT NOT FOR US!!!
HOORAH!
WE'VE NEVER HAD IT SO GOOD, EH, READERS!?!
OH, I DON'T KNOW, DAVE, THINGS AREN'T SO BAD...
SHUT UP KEN!
BAD NEWS IS GOOD NEWS FOR US! FOCUS ON THE NEGATIVE...
LIKE... YOU LOT ARE SO DESPERATE YOU'VE HAD TO CALL ME BACK!
OH NO! TIME TO PUT ON YOUR HUSH-HUSH PUPPIES!
AND I THOUGHT HE WAS A SAFE PAIR OF SHOES!
THAT'S THE TROUBLE WITH KEN - YOU WANT TO GIVE HIM UP BUT YOU DON'T HAVE THE WILLPOWER!
CHORTLE! CHORTLE - NOT!!!

EXCLUSIVE TO ALL NEWSPAPERS

EVERYONE IN BRITAIN SACKED

THERE was the clearest indication today that the recession was deepening, as figures revealed that every person working in Great Britain has been sacked.

"Mass redundancies of this scale were to be expected at some stage, but the fact that every person in Britain has been sacked this early into the recession suggests that the economy could be in for a rougher ride that we expected," said Roger Spectacles, who used to be a member of the highly-respected Institute for Appearing on News 24, before he was sacked.

The Government, however, said that the figures were to be treated with scepticism, pointing out that the polling company which had released the figures had gone into liquidation and all those responsible for the survey had been sacked.

END OF THE WORLD

War, Famine, Death, Plague and Robert Peston

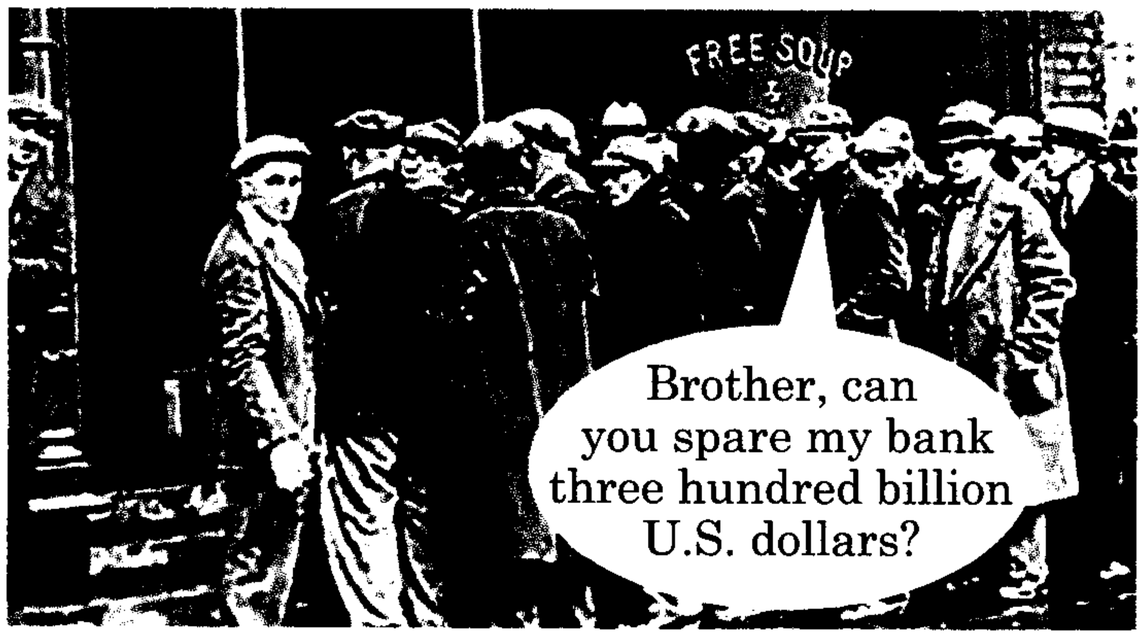
GOVERNMENT TO COMPENSATE FAMILIES OF 'BOTH SIDES' IN 7/7 BOMBINGS

by Our Terrorism Staff **Seamus O'Sama**

THERE was widespread approval yesterday for the Government's decision to hand out £20,000 compensation payments to the relatives of all those involved in terrorist outrages committed in Britain in the past decade.

Particularly delighted were the families of the four suicide bombers responsible for the deaths of 52 people in London in July 2005 *(cont. p. 94)*

DELEGATES ARRIVE FOR DAVOS WORLD ECONOMIC FORUM



Private Eye has decided not to run this humanitarian appeal on the grounds that we must remain impartial at all times.

THE APPEAL YOU WON'T SEE

SAVE THE BBC!

The BBC has been under ferocious attack for weeks, which has caused it irreparable damage.

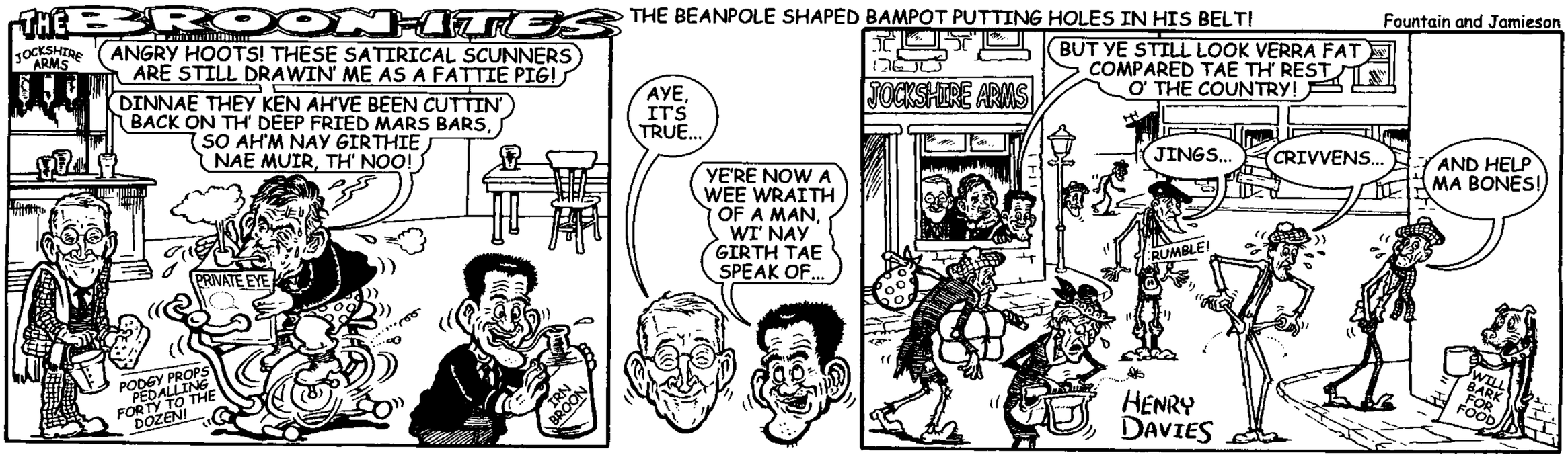
Now it needs your help to survive and begin the long task of reconstructing its reputation.

Take the case of poor **Mark Thompson**, one of the tragic victims of the BBC disaster. "I was just sitting in my office, worrying about the Jonathan Ross show when, all of a sudden, this bombshell blew up in my face. I lost all credibility and found myself being targeted by an army of people gunning for me."

So please help Mark and the rest of his people to save their livelihoods.

Issued by the Broadcasting Disasters Emergency Committee

● Is the Eye right to reject this moving plea? Join the debate by emailing your extreme views on either side to Eyeloon@ima.com_pletenutter

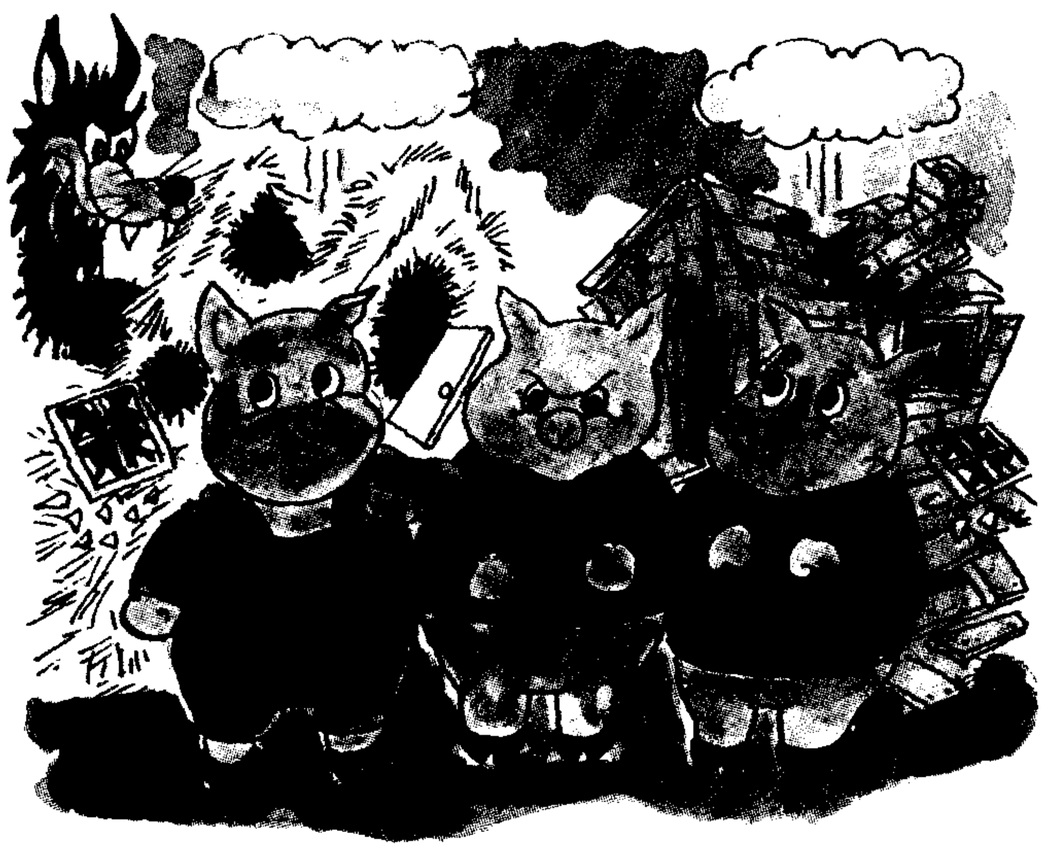

THE BROON-ITES
JOCKSHIRE ARMS
ANGRY HOOTS! THESE SATIRICAL SCUNNERS ARE STILL DRAWIN' ME AS A FATTIE PIG!
DINNAE THEY KEN AH'VE BEEN CUTTIN' BACK ON TH' DEEP FRIED MARS BARS, SO AH'M NAY GIRTHIE NAE MUIR, TH' NOO!
PRIVATE EYE
PODGY PROPS PEDALLING FORTY TO THE DOZEN!
IRN BROON
THE BEANPOLE SHAPED BAMPOT PUTTING HOLES IN HIS BELT!
Fountain and Jamieson
AYE, IT'S TRUE...
YE'RE NOW A WEE WRAITH OF A MAN, WI' NAY GIRTH TAE SPEAK OF...
JOCKSHIRE ARMS
BUT YE STILL LOOK VERRA FAT COMPARED TAE TH' REST O' THE COUNTRY!
JINGS...
CRIVVENS...
AND HELP MA BONES!
RUMBLE!
WILL BARK FOR FOOD
HENRY DAVIES

Nursery Times

Friday, February 6, 2009

PIGS AND WOLF CRISIS

WE MUST REMAIN IMPARTIAL



IN recent days, Nursery Times has come under extensive criticism for our refusal to publish an appeal on behalf of the three little pigs, two of which lost not only their homes, but also their lives, as a result of the recent conflict in the Nursery Region involving the wolf.

The Nursery Times defends its decision on the grounds that it has a duty to remain impartial in its coverage of this crisis, under the terms of the Nursery Times Charter.

While hostilities between the two sides were at their height, we were careful not to take sides, and whilst sympathetic to the plight of the pigs, we invariably recognised the right of the wolf to put his point of view.

This is why we consistently gave space to the wolf's spokesman, who emphasises that he had been extremely hungry and had a right to huff, puff and blow down (or indeed up) any houses that he wished.

On other pages

● EU to Fund Pig Reconstruction Programme Again **14**

● Did Pigs Secretly Belong to Ham-as? *(That's enough. Ed.)*

DRAGONS TO BE REINTRODUCED TO BRITAIN

by Our Environmental Correspondent **St George Monbiot**

CONSERVATIONISTS have welcomed the decision to reintroduce dragons to the British countryside, where they have been extinct for over 1,000 years.

"We are delighted that the dragon is back among us," said a spokesman for the Ancient World Wildlife Fund.

"Once again, this beautiful and iconic creature is free to roam our woods and fields,

breathing fire and devouring maidens."

The dragon's reintroduction has been funded by the EU, as part of its 2-billion-Euro Bio-Diversity and Encouragement of Tourism In Remote Areas Programme.

What You Won't Read In The Daily Mail

Why Oh Why Are We Selling Off Our National Heritage To Dodgy Foreigners?

asks Leading Historian SIR MAX HASTINGS

THE SPANIARDS own our airports. The Indians own our steel industry. The French own our water and electricity.

And now, to cap it all, one of Britain's most prestigious newspapers, the world-famous London Evening Standard, is to be flogged off for a pittance to a former agent of the once-hated Russian KGB.

You couldn't make it up. What has got into the heads of the owners of this hugely respected icon of British journalism that they can so casually hand it over to a shady spy-turned-oligarch?

Reds Under Lebedev

Have the Standard's owners no shame, as they trample on 180 years of proud British reporting, in the name of turning a squalid penny – or should we say Moscow gold?

Just consider what we are witnessing here. A newspaper long famous for its conservative views and traditional British principles will henceforth be the puppet and plaything of a Communist agent whose only concern will be to further the advance of Russian interests across the globe.

And who was responsible for this act of gross national betrayal?

Step forward the craven and cringeing figure of Jonathan Harmsworth, the 3rd Viscount Rothermere, whose grandfather grovelled to Hitler, and who now appears to be keeping up the family tradition by toadying to his new masters in the Kremlin.

© World copyright Hitlertrash Productions 2009.

Advertisement

Royal Souvenir Tea Towel To Commemorate The Separation Of His Highness Prince Harry and Miss Chelsy Tractor

THIS priceless novelty heirloom will always remind you of the Royal Romance That Was Not To Be. And, long after you have forgotten who Ms Tractor was, the tea towel will still be drying up cups and spoons for your children and your children's partners live-in stepchildren.

But that's not all! The Gnome Royal Souvenir Tea Towel has Dual Functionality. When you're tired of doing the dishes you can put it on your head and re-enact Prince Harry Style High Jinks as you pretend to be, literally, a "Rag Head"!!

Have a Right Royal Time with this very wonderful Royal Souvenir Tea Towel (made from 100% Pollytoynbeelene)! Price £149.99 (or €1)

'I'M NOT A POLICEMAN,' Says New Met Chief

by Our Crime Staff **Phil Gaols**

THE newly-appointed head of Britain's top police force, Sir Paul Knacker, appeared today on all TV channels to announce that he wasn't a celebrity.

Posing before the world's media with TV's Boris Johnson, Sir Paul said, "I am a shy, retiring figure who tries to avoid the limelight wherever possible.

"I just want to get on with my job of raiding Parliament and getting into the headlines."

MAN IN THE EYE

WHAT is he like, the new head of the Metropolitan Police Force?

Insiders describe Sir Paul Knacker as high-flying... intensely able... safe pair of hands... policeman's policeman... no-nonsense Northener... no frills... hard graft... will be his own man... intensely bald... safe pair of trousers... not poncey Southern graduate git like his predecessor... *(That's enough Knacker. Ed.)*

Celebrate Chinese New Year With Private Eye's World-Famous Chinese Horoscope Expert *Dim Sun Hak*

YES, it's the Year of the Bull! Every year we fill up the paper with a load of bull about Chinese horoscopes. So, once again, 2009 is the Year of the Bull, just like it was last year!

And anyone born in the Year of the Bull has certain characteristics in common. They are:

- **Reading this newspaper**
- **Pretty thick**
- **Extremely gullible**
- **Er...**
- **That's it!**

And a Happy Chinese New Year to you all!!

FAMOUS "BULLS"

LORD MANDELSON	DAME JOAN BAKEWELL	GENERAL DE GAULLE
LIBERACE	ST. FRANCIS OF ASSISI	PARIS HILTON

Advertisement

The FordVauxJagover

MANDY

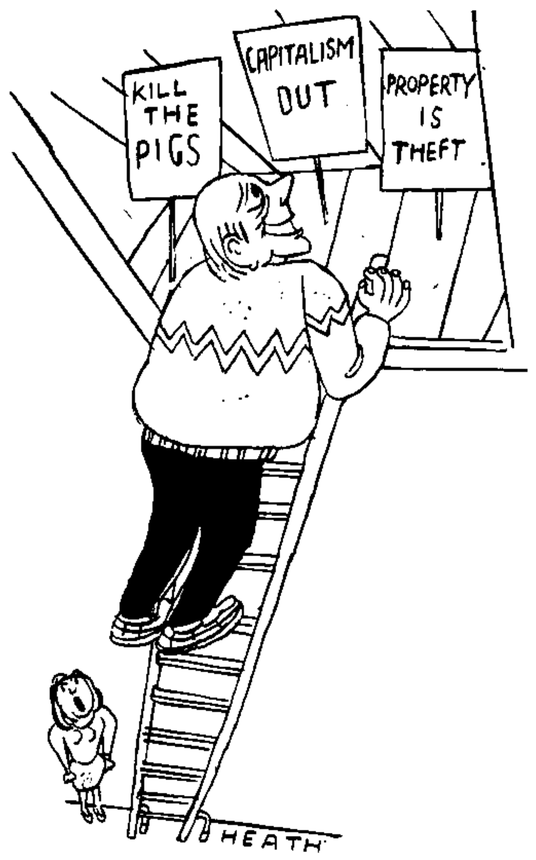
WITH its sleek lines, luxurious hair and impressive handling of even the most difficult and arduous Prime Minister, the **MANDY** is the eagerly awaited motoring event of 2009.

Road tested extensively on the Continent, the **MANDY** is an all-terrain model, as at home at a Labour Conference in Swindon as he is on Nat Rothschild's yacht on the French Riviera.

Capable of performing jaw-dropping u-turns which see the **MANDY** going from 0 to a 2 billion pound loan guarantee scheme for the car industry in under five cabinet meetings, the **MANDY** is the new standard of excellence for British motoring.

With astonishingly bad levels of economy figures and impeccable green credentials as he recycles the bail-outs of the 1970s, the **MANDY** starts from as little as £90,000* on the Government benches.

*Credit for saving the British car industry subject to the usual status checks after another six car plants are closed down next week.



"What are you doing up there?"

News In Brief

FAT TEENAGER WHO DIES TRAGICALLY DOESN'T GET HER PICTURE IN EVERY NEWSPAPER

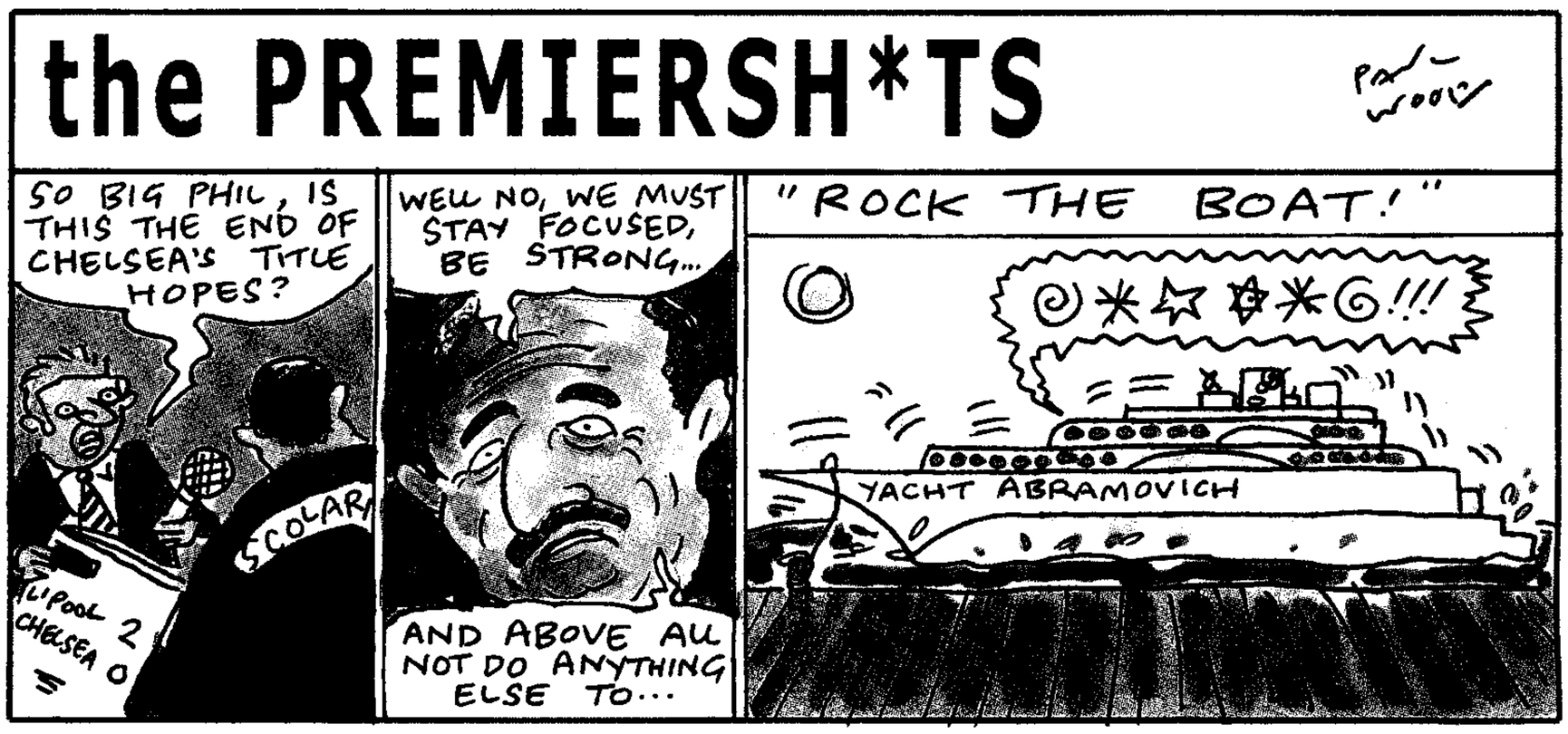
THERE WAS no shock whatsoever today after a fat teenager who died suddenly this week didn't get her picture in any newspaper.

"If only this poor overweight girl had died of a slimming disease, then we'd have felt duty-bound by the scale of the tragedy to run loads of photos of her in skimpy tops to salivate over," said all newspaper editors.

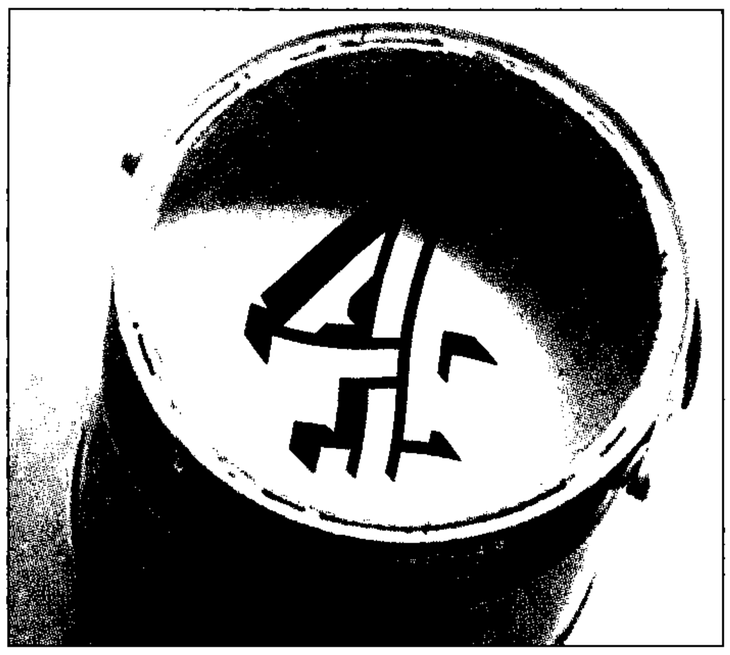
GOD QUERIES EXISTENCE OF ATTENBOROUGH

IN A candid interview in the *Radio Times*, God has admitted he finds it difficult to believe in the concept of David Attenborough.

"I find the concept of an all-powerful, all-knowing white-haired old chap who single-handedly conjures up every award-winning BBC wildlife documentary out of thin air is one that I find pretty hard to swallow," admitted God.


the PREMIERSH*TS
PAUL WOOLEY
SO BIG PHIL, IS THIS THE END OF CHELSEA'S TITLE HOPES?
LIVERPOOL 2 CHELSEA 0
SCOLARI
WELL NO, WE MUST STAY FOCUSED, BE STRONG...
AND ABOVE ALL NOT DO ANYTHING ELSE TO...
"ROCK THE BOAT!"
YACHT ABRAMOVICH

DIARY



NEW TO CHANNEL 4: WATCHING PAINT DRY

Urgent Voice Over (Sam West): Three men. Three women. One tin of white emulsion gloss.

And they're each getting ready for the greatest challenge of their lives: Watching Paint Dry.

Clinically Obese Lady: Ever since I was a little girl, I've had this vision of watching paint dry. And now it's time to follow that dream.

Touchy Gay Man: Paint means the whole world to me. By watching paint dry, I plan to conquer my demons.

Insensitive Posh Girl: My family has been watching paint dry in the same home for the past nine hundred years or more. We were watching paint dry at the Battle of Hastings, for gawd's sake, so don't try to teach me anything about watching paint dry because I'll just have to tell you to piss awf.

Sweary Black Man: I gotta f****** believe in myself. And the only way I can f***** do that, man, is to watch that paint f******dry, d'you hear what the f*** I'm sayin'?

Loud Transvestite: It's all about having faith in myself. I know deep down I can do it. Yes, I truly believe I can sit down and watch that paint dry. (SOB) I know I can.

Disgraced MP: Yes, I had a drink problem. Yes, I had a drugs problem. Yes, I cheated on my wife and kids. And yes, I've served time in prison. But I'm a fighter, not a quitter. I'm back and stronger than ever– and– take it from me– no-one's going to stop me watching that paint dry!

Voice Over: Six people determined to follow their dreams. But only one of them will make it through to the quarter-final. The pressure is on. International Paint-Drying Experts Dan and Sarah let them know the rules.

Expert Dan: In front of each of you is a wall. And on that wall is a fresh coat of paint.

Expert Sarah: You now face the challenge of a lifetime. If you think you can't face the pressure and want to quit, now's the time!

Expert Dan: Team, you have just six hours to watch that paint dry from.....NOW. Okay, let's get watching!

Voice Over: After only two minutes seventeen seconds, Clinically Obese Lady is starting to feel the strain.

Clinically Obese Lady: I was expecting a nutmeg white or a jasmine shimmer, but this is more of a natural calico, or even a white mist. And I'm just so not– SOB!– ready for it.

Voice Over: With the clock still ticking, they are all left struggling to cope. Clinically Obese Lady is not the only one who's worried. It's crunch time. With just five hours and forty-five minutes to go, Expert Sarah makes the decision-of-a-lifetime to race up the motorway in order to have a random row with someone.

Expert Sarah *(while driving)*: I'm sorry, this whole paint-drying project's in danger of going off the rails if I don't find someone who'll make me burst into tears within the next few minutes. I've made up my mind and I'm not going to budge. I've got to tackle them head-on.

Voice Over: With only four hours twenty five minutes to go, Expert Sarah has at last found someone to have it out with.

Expert Sarah: OK! THAT'S IT! *(SOB)* NO-ONE'S EVER SPOKEN TO ME LIKE THAT BEFORE! *(SOB)* I'VE HAD ENOUGH! (*SOB)* I CAN'T GO ON! *(SOB)*

Voice Over: Has this traumatic meeting placed the whole Watching Paint Dry project in jeopardy? One thing's for sure. There's no going back. Driving down the motorway, Expert Sarah fights back her tears– but at the paint-drying centre, it's not looking good for Sweary Black Man.

Sweary Black Man: I bin watching this f***** paint f***** dry for close-on three f*****hours, man, and I tell yer, the pressure's f**** gettin' to me.

Expert Dan: Who do you want to blame? Touchy Gay Man?

Sweary Black Man: Too f***** right I do!

Voice Over: The pressure is on. The whole Watching Paint Dry project is in very real danger of crashing. With less than three hours to go, Expert Dan reveals to Touchy Gay Man that Sweary Black Man is putting the blame firmly on him....

Touchy Gay Man: I'm sorry, but I've never been spoken to like that by anyone in all my entire life. I'm sorry, I'm not prepared to take it any more. I'm sorry, but who does he think he is? That's it!– SOB– I'm off! *(Exits)*

Disgraced MP: Let's be absolutely frank about this, everyone is to blame except me.

Insensitive Posh Girl: Who are you? I've never even heard of you! I don't care what anyone else says, but I blame Loud Transvestite. And I'm vair posh, so I should know.

Clinically Obese Lady: Everyone's picking on me and it's just because I was molested as a little girl and that's why I'm fat! That's it! I've had it up to here!– SOB!– I'm quitting! *(Exits)*

Clinically Obese Lady's Morbidly Obese Mum: I'm so proud of her. She's followed her dream!

Voice Over: Without Clinically Obese Lady and Touchy Gay Man, the whole Watching Paint Dry project is in real jeopardy, but they're adamant they're not going back. Insensitive Posh Girl blames Loud Transvestite and Loud Transvestite blames Disgraced MP and Disgraced MP blames Sweary Black Man. Meanwhile, the paint just won't stop drying....

(Close-up of paint drying, with fast beat music behind)

Expert Dan: Just look at it! It's literally AMAZING! This paint is REALLY DRYING! I've watched paint dry many, many times before, internationally, but I've literally never seen paint dry quite like this. It's truly EXTRAORDINARY!

(Even closer close-up of paint continuing to dry, with even faster beat music behind)

Expert Sarah: Oh, my god, I'm now seriously, seriously worried that the paint won't have dried in time. Oh my god, the tension's unbearable!

Voice Over: With less than two hours and forty-two hot and hectic minutes to go, how will the remaining team-members cope? Will they be able to follow their dreams – or will their worlds come crashing down around them? For all of them, it's going to be a life-changing experience. It's time to put aside their differences. But what if the paint doesn't dry? And what if it dries too soon? Now the heat is really on. One thing's for sure. Watching paint dry doesn't get much tougher than this.

(Episode 1 of 12)

As told to

CRAIG BROWN

SIR, I DON'T THINK MADAM HAS QUITE TAKEN ON BOARD THAT THE ECONOMIC DOWNTURN IS AFFECTING EVEN CELEBRITIES...
HER PRESENTING AND ACTING WORK WILL BECOME HARDER TO FIND SO SHE HAS TO MANAGE EXPENDITURE... AND STREAMLINE AND TRIM WHERE SHE CAN...
TELL ME ABOUT IT...
I STRESSED THAT IN HARD FINANCIAL TIMES IT'S ALL ABOUT SURVIVAL OF THE FITTEST...
AND?
SHE'S HIRED AN EXTRA PERSONAL FITNESS COACH....

Literary Review

Porn again

In Bed With

Edited by Kathy Lette, Imogen-Edwards Jones, Jessica Adams and Maggie Alderson

(Sphere, 7.99)

THIS is a collection of 20 "unashamedly erotic" short stories about sex by "your favourite women novelists". If that weren't marketing wheeze enough, there's a further hook: though we know who the writers are (they include Adele Parks, Ali Smith, Esther Freud, Jane Moore and Rachel Johnson), their stories are written under *noms-de-porn* made up of their first pet and the street they live on. You're expected to look at, say, *Breaking the Rules* by Pom Pom Paradise, cross-reference with the list of contributors and try to decipher who wrote what.

This makes for riveting sport, although not quite in the way the publishers might have imagined. Principally, it is a welcome diversion from the stories, which are generally god-awful. It's also a chance to don your socio-cultural goggles and note that these writers owned pets called Rosa, Harriet and Bunty (as opposed to Steve, Adolf or Disemboweller).

But mostly, the pen names are there for the authors' benefit, not the readers': there are some serious crimes against short-form fiction here but the joy of using pseudonyms is that no one is going to get fingered.

Pun intended, by the way – it's in the spirit of the task at hand. No crass wordplay or creamy cliché goes away unbludgeoned. Bushes get trimmed, the word "come" is mutilated beyond recognition, chests are always ample and curves are glorious.

Husbands who work in banks are useless and flaccid, whereas Mellors-esque sons of the soil have six-packs and huge dongs and mate readily with bored fortysomething housewives. Everyone who isn't a flustered mother with sick on her front is a "perfectly groomed" glamourpuss in a navy-blue Chanel cardy.

Combine the hackneyed narratives with the wearisome extended metaphors and you can summarise pretty much the entire book in a single breath: women are atrophying on the vine of life. All they need is some fertiliser, preferably administered via a spuming hose, and they will flower again.

Remove the frilly knickers of literary credibility and this is no different from the Scandinavian plumber coming in to fix madame's piping with his big wrench. Ladies, if it's porn you want, the internet has something for everyone, and it's free.

If it's good writing you're after, however, the task is harder. Perhaps the most annoying thing about *In Bed With* is that the marketing brief – basically, one-handed reading by name authors – works like a chastity belt on the one or two good writers who have stumbled into this collection. Stories such as The Come On by "Ruffy Sainte-Marie" are hamstrung by a brief that demands a money-shot, when plainly Ruffy's interest is in how people connect emotionally, rather than literal couplings.

These apart, what is so depressing about *In Bed With* is that if this really is the best "your favourite women novelists" can do, then the debate amongst columnists shouldn't be about female empowerment but about female talent.

Forget, for a minute, what *In Bed With* might signify. Look instead at what it is: "She felt like Edmund Hillary, planting his flag on Everest, as she put her hand on Mark's shoulder." Whoever gave us that – or indeed "his cock jumping like a freshly landed fish" – is paid to write for a living.

To read *In Bed With* as a rallying cry for female sexual emancipation, as some commentators have done, is to go straight to the metatext without passing Go.

WHAT YOU DIDN'T MISS, Pt 94

Maurice Bowra: A Life

Leslie Mitchell

(Oxford University Press, £25)

...It was in the spring of 1939, with storm clouds gathering across Europe, that Maurice became involved in perhaps the most legendary episode of his disputatious Oxford career: the unusually vexed question of who should succeed Professor Horace Yaughn to the Chair of Sanskrit.

The leading candidate, hotly supported by Bowra's old *bête noire*, Dame Enid Starborgling of Somerville, of whose hair-style he is once supposed to have remarked "All the colours of the Rimbaud", was Dr Hiram Oaks. "But I don't at all pine for Oaks to be at the 'elm' Bowra is reliably reported to have complained. A second aspirant, the celebrated American scholar Silas Bole of the University of New Dworkin, was also found wanting.

"On the whole, not Bole," Bowra pronounced. Lady Primula Tanqueray is thought to have fainted with delight when this *bon mot* was conveyed to her at the breakfast table at Poshleigh Grange, Salop, where Bowra enjoyed so many stimulating weekends.

Amidst the cares of office and the internecine politicking that gave pre-war Oxford its distinctive savour, Bowra managed to find time for a relaxing holiday with his friends Reggie Simper, the brilliant young fellow of All Souls, and the Hon. Gavin Twisk.

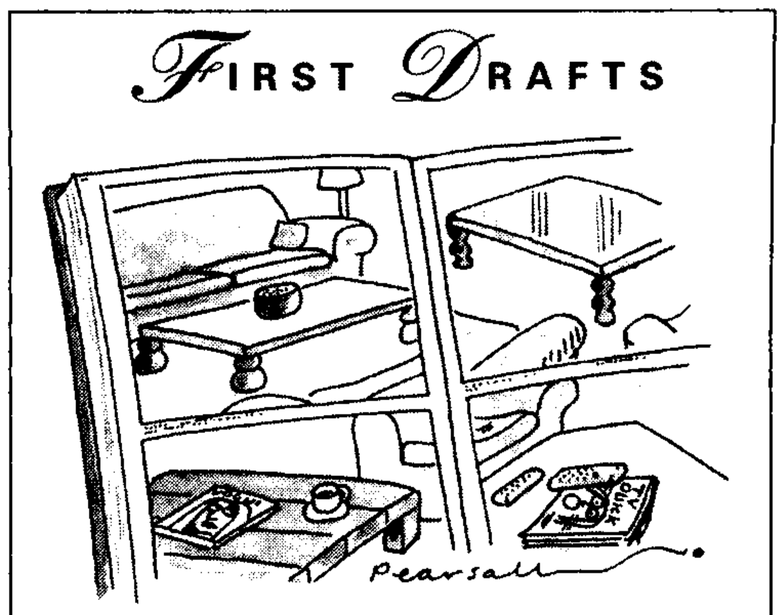
Writing from Berlin to his friend the Countess of Axminster, in one of the witty communications for which he is so renowned, he disclosed that "it is all highly agreeable, and the Germans are all most accommodating – particularly the boys one meets in the Unter den Linden. Reggie has caught a picturesque disease and Gavin has been very naughty. Meanwhile I have been thinking hard about the heritage of symbolism. Professor D'Ulle's death, is of course, a great blow." The irony of that last sentence would not have been lost on his correspondent...

...The first fruit of these lucubrations was Bowra's influential study *Attic Wanderings*. Its opening paragraph may be taken as the summation of everything he believed in, his insistence on truth, individual responsibility and the humanist pursuit of all that is best and good in life. "The poet," he wrote, "is really rather a special chap, not at all like those ghastly bank-clerks and the politicians who go about stopping us having a good time. It is our duty to furnish the conditions in which the productions of his muse may best be realised – elegantly panelled rooms, lots of friends to gossip with and plenty of servants. But, of course, nobody really cares about art these days."

The failure of *Attic Wanderings* and its successor, the autobiographical *Ramblings*, to win a permanent place in the literature of our time was one of Bowra's most grievous disappointments. And yet it is Maurice's influence on so many succeeding generations that remains his most lasting memorial. As Gervase Drudge, later a senior official in the Ministry of Pensions, recalled: "Most dons just wanted you to do tedious things like get on with your work and be a credit to the college.

But Maurice was different. He wanted to have you to dinner, so he could make up smutty limericks and tell you how he hated the Professor of Greek. He encouraged us all to despise convention and achieve our full potential as human beings, and I have always been grateful to him."

Lady Stultitia Blodwyn, whose *amitié amoreuse* with Maurice must surely count as one of his most bitter-sweet relationships, agreed: "Maurice was simply frightfully amusing. It was as if we were all at the Court of Louis XIV, and not just at Oxford listening to some egotistical old don droning on..." [*continues for hundreds of pages*].



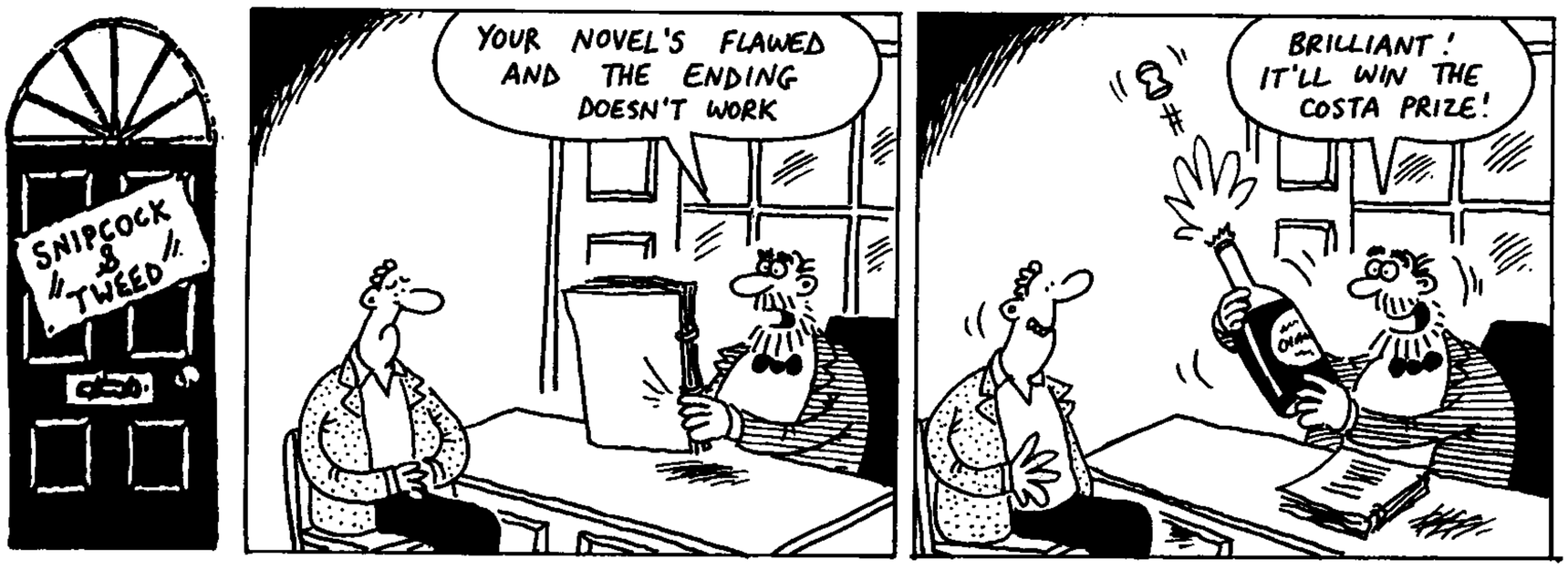
Coffee Table Book

LIBRARY NEWS

■ ANOTHER mobile library service bites the dust thanks to council spending cuts – but at least the people of Rhyl, North Wales will still have something to read... the council's newsletter.

Denbighshire county councillors agreed to scrap the mobile library, an important service for elderly and disabled people, in order to shave £44,000 off their budget.

An alternative option for spending cuts was the council's £142,000-a-year *County Voice* newsletter, the latest edition of which was packed with self-congratulatory fluff about improvements to the customer service department and recycling. *Voice* will now only come out quarterly, but was spared the chop.



Books & Bookmen

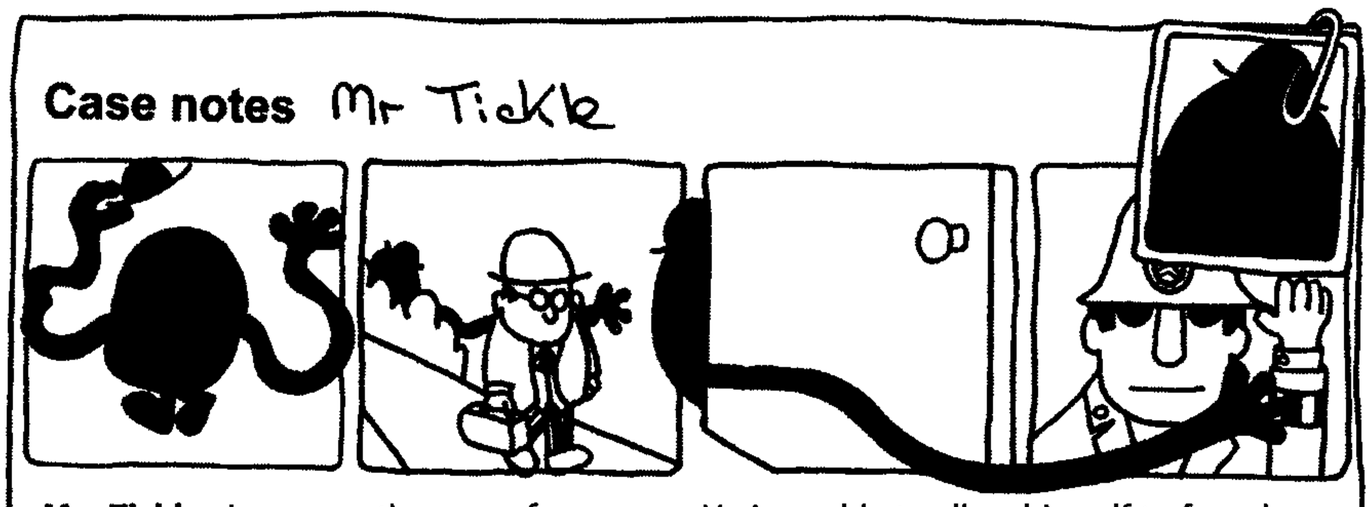
■ SELF-PROCLAIMED King of Hay-on-Wye Richard "Bokassa" Booth has returned from his Egyptian sojourn to face the rebels in the Powys book town (*Eye* 1225) who believe his gift for publicity is failing him.

Far from being angry, Bokassa has proposed that the rebels join him in "an alliance against Rupert Murdoch", to combat the commercialisation of the Hay Festival. However, the refuseniks, led by Paul Harris of Oxford House Books, believe that while such jolly Boothian grand gestures ensure that everyone knows about Richard Booth and Hay, he lacks the energy to follow them up nowadays.

Also, the jury's out on whether Booth's ruses bring book-lovers anywhere near the town any more, while uncontroversial nuts-and-bolts publicity might just work. So no alliance will be forthcoming.

Local critics of the rebels suggest that they lack Booth's flair, but with a show trial and an "execution" in hand, and newspaper coverage (picking up on the *Eye*'s lead, as ever) gathering momentum, the rebels would appear to be just as eccentric and effective as Bokassa was in his prime.

'Bookworm'


Case notes Mr Tickle
Mr Tickle is a gentleman of orange extraction. He is superficially well-liked and funny. The client has a blatant disregard for the norms and rules of his community, this maybe because of his perceived rejection by society due to his marked disfigurement.
He is unable to allow himself to form long attachments, and has glib relationships. Mr Tickle is unable to profit from any punishment, his lack of guilt would indicate to me that he is a sociopath.
Simon Brodkin
Literary Psychologist

UNIVERSITY NEWS

RECENT woes at the University of London's Senate House Library (SHL) began when the Higher Education Funding Council for England (Hefce) reviewed its funding of research libraries. It found that SHL – which holds a humanities-based collection with some social sciences – "struggles to provide first-class services and facilities to the national research community" and announced the phasing-out of an annual £1.1m payment to SHL.

The loss brought SHL's financial difficulties into sharp relief. The power relationship between the University of London (UoL) and its colleges was reversed in 1993, when Hefce funded colleges directly, leaving the university dependent on subscriptions for central services like libraries. Library bosses say colleges underfunded the library for years. When Hefce withdrew the funding, it was already losing over £1m a year.

The colleges then drafted in Chems Consulting to review the library's services. The college heads agreed to decide on the library's future in April, giving more time to develop some proposals further.

Meanwhile, UCL has put forward a plan to merge SHL with its own library. But not everyone is happy: small and specialist colleges have built their collections around SHL and rely on its shelves for core texts. The Chems report warned that once collections are integrated, "it will be increasingly difficult to ensure that any guarantees about open access to them are maintained, as UCL's own collection management policies would tend to prevail".

Queen Mary is concerned it won't be able to use access to the UoL library to promote the college to prospective students in the same way. Others fear this is part of UCL's attempt to build a Bloomsbury empire, and will provide a fatal blow to UoL.

ERIC THOMAS, vice-chancellor of Bristol University, won plaudits recently for his donation of £100,000 (from his £270,000 salary) to the university's centenary fundraising drive. But university funds are now to be used to send Prof Thomas on a world tour.

The Centenary International Tour, to be undertaken in two long-haul trips and two visits to Europe between September and December this year, will take in San Francisco, Vancouver, Toronto, New York, Hong Kong, Kuala Lumpur, Sydney, Melbourne, Auckland, Paris and Athens. The invitation to alumni says the events will include talks about Bristol's plans for the future and "plenty of time for informal socialising". Prof Thomas will be joined on the tour by his wife Narell "and a host of Bristol academics".

The university sniffily told the Eye that it hadn't yet booked all the tickets for the trips, but that they were likely to cost around £7,000 and would be paid for by Bristol as they were business trips. It said it hoped the talks would encourage alumni to donate to Bristol's fundraising. Nice work if you can get it!

UNIVERSITY bosses representative Bill Wakeham, meanwhile, has been lecturing lecturers on pay restraint in difficult economic times.

In January, the chair of the Universities and Colleges Employers' Association wrote in the Times Higher Education Supplement that the 8 percent pay claim by the Universities and Colleges Union was "perverse" and that universities were carefully "balancing the need for properly rewarded staff with the financial stability of our institutions".

So, does Wakeham practise similar restraint for the sake of stable university finances? Not likely. His own salary as vice-chancellor of Southampton University has risen by £44,000 to £240,000 in the past two years, a staggering 22 percent rise.

She's got the bones of a flamingo and the spirit of a gladiator. And I agreed to do this interview because I was curious how young celebs in the 21st century (the last gasp of the patriarchies) are replaying the roles of gods and goddesses of classical civilisation, as figures to both live through and learn from.

LAURA HUTTON interviews Lindsay Lohan, *Interview Magazine*

'Here I stand. I can do no other. God help me.' Martin Luther spoke those words in 1521 but Wasps and England could be forgiven for changing the last three words to 'God help us!' as we analyse the quasi-epidemic of the Cipriani Charge-Down.

STUART BARNES on Danny Cipriani, *Sunday Times*

Hi, here are some things I am thinking about: circles of light, the Arctic, witches, mammals, Samoa, the slavery of addiction and late-stage capitalism, woman power, families treasuring their transgendered children, the United Nations International Panel on Climate Change, feral intuition and a global new two-spirit alliance, forests, oxygen, carbon, patriarchal religions and hierarchies that would rather catalyse apocalypse than admit that centuries of male domination have almost destroyed us, a feminist revolution might save our world.

ANTONY HEGARTY's web-page for his band Antony and the Johnsons

For lunch (on Saturday), it's one of three places, all of them Italian. If I've shaved and I'm wearing a fresh shirt I'll probably go to Downtown Cipriani. If I'm wearing a non-fresh shirt and I've not shaved, then Giorgione in Soho. For lunch (on Sunday) if I've got a jacket on, I'll go to the Brook Club or Uptown Cipriani (that's if I've shaved and have a jacket and a clean shirt. I listen to show tunes, mid-century jazz. I basically have the taste of an 80 year-old gay man.

GRAYDON CARTER
'My Perfect Weekend', *Financial Times* 'How to Spend It' magazine

'I went to a lovely school and I got an incredible education,' she says. And I actually think that my education is what sets me apart, 'cos I'm very smart.' She taps her head. ' I don't know that my schooling was conducive to wild ideas and creativity, but it gave me discipline, drive. They taught me how to think. I really know how to think.' She searches for an example. 'If I decide to make a coat red in the show, it's not just red' she explains. 'I think: is it communist red? Is it cherry cordial? Is it ruby red? Or is it apple red? Or the big balloon red?' I mean there's so many fucking different kinds of red. And so you have to say, well, what are we trying to say in this scene? Is it a happy red? Or a sad red? Is it a lace red? Or a leather red? Or a wool red? It's like there are so many components to making a show and making art, and my school taught me how to think that way.'

LADY GAGA on her school, the Convent of the Sacred Heart in Manhattan, the *Guardian*

Pseuds Corporate

We believe effective commissioning is the key to the delivery of personalisation and to making a very different offer to the citizens of Lancashire.

Lancashire County Council advertisement for two jobs in the Adult & Community Services Directorate

CONTRIBUTORS: Will Parkhouse, Daniel Clayton, John Knight, Ian Taylor, Craig Robertson, David Chard.

£10 paid for all entries

IN THE BACK

HM Revenue & Customs

Pay daze

GORDON BROWN repeatedly claims that he understands people's anger with the banks for the part they played in creating the financial crisis, but does he have any idea of the public's increasing anger with the way Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs is treating those struggling to pay their outstanding tax bills?

Although HMRC has set-up what it quaintly calls a "Time-to-pay-line", callers requesting leeway are routinely being threatened with legal action by harassed call centre staff.

Although the government has admonished high-street lenders for not passing on interest rate cuts to borrowers, when hard pressed taxpayers are given more time to pay, they are told they will be charged interest at an annual rate of 3.5 percent – a full 2 percentage points higher than the Bank of England's base rate.

The 3.5 percent rate applies to those who owe tax from self-employment, pay-as-you-earn, VAT, stamp duty and corporation tax. And despite the negative publicity surrounding the use of credit cards and the dangers of easy lending that enabled many to build up debts they can no longer afford to pay back, last month HMRC for the first time allowed those with outstanding tax to pay with a credit card, for which the HMRC charges a handling fee of 1.25 percent.

Oh fiddle sticks!

WHILE the little man or woman struggling to pay the tax they owe gets it in the neck from zealous HM Revenue and Customs staff (see above), those trying to avoid paying much larger amounts are more likely than ever to get away with it.

For HMRC has decided to overlook some huge tax bills in the name of... efficiency. So severe are the 25,000 job cuts forced through under recent "efficiency" reviews that when a company becomes insolvent, the taxman will now only chase up unpaid tax if it exceeds £100,000.

Even HMRC's bosses seem exasperated at the move. Investigations director Mike Eland told staff he was trying "to deliver the best possible results with the people at our disposal. As part of this ongoing review my senior managers in SI [Special Investigations] have taken the decision to increase the threshold for new insolvency cases to £100,000 to bring it more in line with the other work areas in SI." In other words, serious tax fiddling for less than 100 big ones is unlikely to be investigated seriously.

Slip-ups on tax returns get through, too. Omitted income up to £5,000 – dealt with as a "minor query" – will not be followed up if one attempt to contact the errant taxpayer is unsuccessful. The case is dismissed as "no contact/no agreement" and written off, meaning up to a £2,000 windfall for a 40 percent taxpayer.

Another disgruntled tax inspector recently wrote to Large Business Service boss Melanie Dawes complaining that "staff cuts and the removal of local offices and therefore local intelligence information means they are about as likely to be investigated as they are to win the lottery". Two weeks later HMRC announced the

closure of 93 offices across the UK by 2011, with the anticipated loss of 3,000 jobs – jobs which, official figures confirm, recover several times their costs if used to chase the billions of tax that is going missing.

Small wonder the public accounts committee recently concluded that HMRC is "making little ground" in its fight against the hidden economy. New HMRC chairman and ex-private equity man Mike Clasper (pictured) has made his mark by launching a "vision" which concludes: "We will be seen as a highly professional and efficient organisation". But as HMRC's "customer operations director" Simon Smith admits: "It is the place we want to be, but I accept that we still have some way to go."

Don't scoff

LIFE remains sweet at the top of HMRC, however, as the country's biggest tax avoiders will always stump up for good scoff for the boss.

Freedom of information inquiries by the *Eye* reveal that "big four" accountancy firms Ernst & Young, KPMG, Deloitte and PwC, who between them sell hundreds of tax avoidance schemes every year, are particularly keen to schmooze the HMRC director-general responsible for fighting their activities, Dave Hartnett.

In 18 months up to December 2006 (the latest period for which HMRC would release information), Mr Hartnett was entertained by the big four 17 times. His most avid host, KPMG, took him to dinner five times, including to the Mirabelle, the Cinnamon Club with the firm's boss Loughlin Hickey, to supper at Simpsons and put him up in the Park Lane Hilton ahead of the firm's annual tax symposium.

Deloitte, meanwhile, also took Hartnett to his favourite Cinnamon Club to discuss "better use of consultancy support" and to the mandarins' haunt of Shepherds in Westminster to introduce an HMRC colleague.

Although the extent of the schmoozing appears to breach HMRC rules limiting hospitality to being "not too frequent" and "not part of a pattern of invitations", an HMRC spokesman insists there was nothing wrong: "Anyone who thinks HMRC would be inclined to dilute its opposition to tax avoidance as an outcome of some working dinners is clearly unaware of the recent history of tax avoidance in the UK."

Entirely coincidentally, HMRC is keen to protect what it told the *Eye* was a "constructive, grown up relationship with the big four accountancy firms" and has refused to say how many tax avoidance schemes they have been forced to cough up to in the last couple of years under disclosure laws.

Another firm with cause to be grateful to the Revenue in 2006 was Shell. As the Eye exposed at the time (*Eye* 1158), in that year's budget a let-out from a clampdown on companies dumping profits in tax havens was found specifically for the oil company in secretive circumstances. In September Hartnett attended a dinner hosted by the firm after a conference in Amsterdam.

And in one really smart use of taxpayers' money, Hartnett and a group of other civil servants trotted off to the trendy Baltic restaurant to discuss a "capability review" of the Department for Work and Pensions. The other mandarins picking up the tab were from the Cabinet Office which is nextdoor to Hartnett's Whitehall office.

ZIMBABWE

Harare home

"ZIMBABWE's crisis is one that the world has a responsibility to respond to." So says foreign secretary David Miliband. How extraordinary then that it has taken protracted legal proceedings to stop his counterpart at the Home Office from deporting so many Zimbabweans who have fled Robert Mugabe's murderous regime.

At the end of last year, the asylum and immigration tribunal not only allowed the appeal of a teacher whom the Home Office had wanted to send home, but also issued new "country guidance" notes which will make it easier for many desperate Zimbabweans to claim refugee status in the UK.

They will no longer have to prove they were active members or supporters of the opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) before being accepted as genuine refugees. Protection will now have to be afforded to those like the teacher (not named for her protection) who would be unable to prove to Mugabe's henchman that they were loyal to his Zanu PF regime.

Despite the mounting evidence of terror and abuses inflicted on anyone, or indeed any community, perceived to oppose Mugabe, there has been little acceptance on the part of immigration officers and ministers. Only days after the tribunal ruling, home secretary Jacqui Smith claimed to cabinet colleagues that the cholera outbreak in Zimbabwe would boost the numbers trying to enter the UK using false passports from neighbouring countries.

However, her department had little choice but to rewrite its operational guidance notes on Zimbabwe to immigration officers in the light of the teacher's test case. The notes now state that: "Zimbabweans who have given a credible account and established that on return they would be unable to demonstrate that they are supporters of, or loyal to, Zanu PF should be treated as being at real risk of mistreatment on return to Zimbabwe and should be granted asylum." This will be a huge relief to hundreds of Zimbabwean asylum seekers who are living in penury in Britain because they are not allowed to work (though the backlog means it may still be many months before they are granted refugee status.)

Meanwhile it seems Smith's department is going to try to persuade some Zimbabweans to return voluntarily. A new package of support for those risking Mugabe's wrath includes… cholera vaccines!

EMERGENCY SERVICES

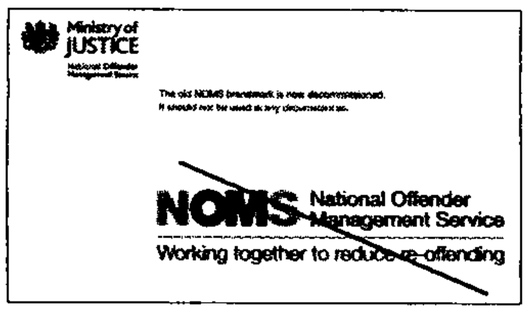
Ire brigade

MORE problems for the government's troubled FireControl project, which aims to replace 46 emergency service control centres with nine big hi-tech regional ones but is already late and overbudget.

Fire chiefs in the south west want a public inquiry into the delay in opening the new centre in Taunton, Somerset. As reported in *Eye* 1226, the new building is completed, but with the rest of FireControl (including the FireLink communications system) behind schedule, the centre is empty (at a cost of £5,000 a day) yet not scheduled to open until July 2010.

Not only that, but local fire service bosses fear that it has been built to the wrong specifications, with Avon fire authority chair Terry Walker describing it as "much too large".

Meanwhile, government figures provided to the Fire Brigades Union show that the other eight empty new fire control centres are costing £750,000 a month. One, in Cambridge, costs £85,000 a month for leasing, maintenance and security. Its estimated opening date? August 2011.


Ministry of JUSTICE
The old NOMS brandmark is now decommissioned.
NOMS National Offender Management Service
Working together to reduce re-offending

Rom-dom com

THE Ministry of Justice is trying to airbrush from history four troubled years of the National Offender Management Service (NOMS). A 16-page document on the rebranding of "new NOMS" asserts that it was launched in April 2008. But the *Eye* has been exposing the shortcomings of different incarnations of the "old" NOMS since January 2004!

NOMS was set up to merge prisons and probation services and to provide "joined up" offender management from court sentencing to prison and release. But with prison and probation staff struggling to cope with a record prison population and growing workload, NOMS is accused of achieving little for its £2bn of taxpayers' money.

From the outset NOMS was beset by confusion, mismanagement, criticism over the costs of consultants and its new IT system, and opposition from MPs. In just two years it became a bloated bureaucracy: its annual budget quadrupled to £899m – £67m more than the entire budget for the probation service for England and Wales. Various reforms were tried and rejected, and it finally became an "agency" last June – but to no great effect.

With agency status came the announcement that the posts of the 10 ROMS, or regional offender managers, were to be abolished (cost: £25m for the past three years). They were supposed to have been responsible for commissioning, personnel, finance and other duties to deliver probation and prison services. But the government never managed to abolish the old 42 probation boards which remain responsible for probation – making that part of the ROMS role redundant.

As part of the new "rebranded" NOMS, by April the ROMs will be replaced by DOMS, or directors of offender management, on similar salaries of between £81,000 and £160,000. Plus ça change... The probation union Napo, which is to ask the National Audit Office to look into the agency, said: "NOMs has been a bureaucratic and financial disaster that they simply cannot airbrush from history. It has failed to deliver and lacks all credibility."

Wrong man for the job

THE former prison governor chosen by the Ministry of Justice to head an "independent" inquiry into the treatment of a teenage girl who repeatedly tried to take her own life while in jail, has been told to step down by the high court.

As *Eye* 1222 revealed, the choice of Bryan Payling, former boss of Glen Parva young offenders' institution, to chair an inquiry into the treatment of "SP" was alarming. The 17-year-old, who had severe mental health problems, was serving a five-year sentence for assault and robbery at New Hall YOI. After SP harmed herself on several occasions so seriously that she had to be hospitalised, jail staff placed her in solitary confinement for 22 hours a day. Eventually the Howard League prison reform charity won an injunction stopping SP from being returned to prison from hospital. She was instead taken to a secure hospital for psychiatric care.

Prisons ombudsman Stephen Shaw quit as chair of the SP inquiry last year, complaining of "unwarranted and unacceptable" attempts by the Prison Service to fetter his independence. The high court ruled last month that replacing him with Mr Payling would "fail to meet the requirement for independence" needed for such an inquiry.

Mr Payling, who had also been a Prison Service area manager for the West Midlands, was involved in formulating some of the very policies that were to be investigated, having been consulted on initiatives on self harm and safer custody. He also happened to be a "social acquaintance" of one of the key witnesses, Sarah Snell, the governor of New Hall. They had met mainly at prison conferences, but in 2007 they had lunch together in Harrogate to discuss Mr Payling's experience of working in Bermuda, where Ms Snell was considering applying for a job.

Mr Payling's removal means the SP inquiry has yet to get underway. Meanwhile, on 8 January, another woman, Alison Colk, was found hanging in her cell at HMP Styal in Cheshire on the first night of a 28-day sentence for theft. The Prison Service clearly has a lot to learn about coping with vulnerable prisoners – if only it could get its inquiry started.

FAULTY GUNS

Misfiring squad

WORRIES over the misfiring switch on the British army's Warrior armoured car (*Eyes passim*) continue, with news that an attempt to remedy the problem has, er, failed.

The Warrior "infantry fighting vehicle" – a cross between a battlefield taxi and a weapon – is one of the army's most important workhorses in Iraq and Afghanistan. It has a turret with a small cannon and powerful machine gun, but, as the *Eye* revealed in December, the Ministry of Defence knew back in 1999 that there was a fault in the firing mechanism. The foot-firing switch could get stuck in the "on" position, so the cannon or machine gun could shoot without warning when reloaded. "Undemanded fire" incidents have killed Iraqis and caused other injuries.

The good news is that in 2007 the army began replacing the switch. The bad news is that the replacement doesn't work either and is now itself being replaced.

The newer system gets rid of the foot pedal and puts a firing switch on the gunner's hand controls. Unfortunately, the switch is attached to the controls with a curly cable, something like that on a telephone handset. In the field, gunners inside a moving turret found that the curly cable got tangled and broke – so, eight years on, the replacement firing switch is no good, and the replacement for the replacement has not been approved.

An MoD spokesman told the *Eye*: "A new firing switch system was designed and tested extensively before it was manufactured in 2007 and then rolled out to the Warrior fleet. Subsequently it was identified that under certain usage conditions the hand-firing switch system can suffer wear. A system of user checks has been put in place to mitigate this, while the design is altered.

"The new design is now at an advanced stage and testing has yielded good results, and further tests are planned. The situation is being kept under constant review by the appropriate safety bodies within MoD and every effort is being made to ensure that an amended system is fielded as soon as possible."

So who is to blame? Ultra Electronics, which recently recruited former British defence procurement chief Sir Robert Walmsley, makes the new firing switch but referred questions to BAE, the "design authority" which made the Warrior. Private Eye asked the MoD how much BAE was being paid to replace the replacement, but it said: "Costs are commercially sensitive and cannot be released."

PUBLIC GUARDIANS

OPU tips

SCANDALOUS delays continue at the shambolic Office of the Public Guardian (OPG), the new body set up to grant powers of attorney which allow friends, family or trusted professionals to make financial decisions for people who lose mental capacity.

The OPG was swamped with applications after it opened in October 2007 and fell massively behind. In June last year, *Eye* 1213 reported the case of financial adviser Andrew Sellers who was refused a refund of the £150 fee when his client died after waiting months for a reply to an application for lasting power of attorney.

Mr Sellers complained to the Adjudicator's Office, the official watchdog, which finally replied last month telling him that it "may still be several months" before they can allocate his case to an officer, because of "the volume of complaints received" about the hapless OPG!

The watchdog has, however, already ruled on other cases, blasting the long delays endured by a "Mr A" who had applied to the OPG on behalf of his mother. "As a direct result of the OPG's failure to handle this case properly, Mr A and his family suffered considerable worry and distress," said the adjudicator, ruling that the OPG gave very poor service and ordering it to pay £950 and £255 costs to the family.

TUBE SACKINGS

Taking the ISS

YET another union rep from the London Underground's cleaners has been sacked by subcontractors working for mayor Boris Johnson (see last *Eye*).

The cleaners work for ISS, a multinational company that has the contract to clean Underground trains and stations. ISS works for Transport for London, which is chaired by Boris.

Last year the low-paid cleaners won a very significant 30 percent pay increase, taking them up to the £7.40-an-hour "London Living Wage". Boris backed this regional minimum. However, while he gained political advantage from supporting the London Living Wage, he has stayed remarkably silent while his subcontractor sacks the RMT union reps who won the deal.

The latest union rep to be sacked is Philip Mumbaliya, a cleaner at the Hainault depot. ISS said it was dismissing him because his immigration status was not settled, but he had already worked for the firm for six years, in which time ISS never questioned his status. However, before ISS dismissed him, two things changed about Philip's position: firstly, he finally got his "leave to remain", regularising his status. Secondly, he became a union rep.

So, after years of employing Philip with an uncertain immigration status, ISS decided to sack him when he finally made his employment and residence status legitimate.

His dismissal follows the sacking of another union rep, Mary Boakye, whom ISS dismissed after a manager took a picture of her sitting with her eyes closed on a Tube train. Mary was in fact locked in the train she had just cleaned and was waiting to be let out.

ISS says she was sleeping, a charge she denies. In fact, Mary says she had hurt her eye when she was hit in the face by defective cleaning machinery, but because ISS did not offer sick leave and because she had already used two days' annual leave, she returned to work with a still painful eye, which she was resting while she – in a breach of ISS rules – sat down while waiting to be let out of the train.

NHS PLC

PFI

The foundations are crumbling

NEWS that an NHS foundation trust in Slough has abandoned a private finance initiative deal to build a £200m hospital at Wexham Park attracted little attention. But the reality is that the credit crunch has done for hospital PFI schemes what commonsense (that they are a bad deal for taxpayers) was unable to.

The number of new PFI hospital deals is down from a 10-year average of 20 a year to just seven, as frightened trusts add up the giddying costs and the private sector recoils from the prospect of shouldering the financial risk.

The first blow was the collapse of the relatively low-cost option of raising cash through issuing bonds, insured by so-called "monoline" insurers based in the US. The monolines, headed by market leaders MBIA and Ambac, insure an estimated $2.4 trillion of public-sector schemes and assets in the US, but were lured into toxic sub-prime markets and exposed as having pitifully small assets with which to back up their potential debts. (MBIA, for example, could pay out a maximum of $14.2bn but was insuring potential debts of more than $1tn).

The demise of monoline insurance, which had underwritten billions in loans to UK hospital and other PFI schemes, has left PFI consortia dependent on bank lending. But then the credit crunch, followed by the failure late last year to secure a government commitment to underwrite the debts (and PFI contracts) of any foundation trust that goes belly-up, exposed the glaring weaknesses of PFI. Suddenly no one wants to risk financing large PFI schemes – even those already downsized to reduce the price – when the cost to trusts is more than they can afford.

Liverpool's plan for a new £477m hospital, for example, is set to cost the trust the equivalent of 12.44 percent of its annual revenue. However, only 5.8 percent of its funding from treating patients under the NHS "payment by results" tariff is intended to go towards capital costs. Thus PFI could mean the Royal Liverpool and Broadgreen Hospitals Trust (and many more like it) could effectively lose money on almost every episode of treatment, pushing them towards financial failure just as the safety nets have been removed. Brilliant!

SUPER-TRUSTS

Merge and purge

PROVING that misery loves company, the residents of Bexley, Bromley and Greenwich look set to be presented with a massive, heavily indebted "super-trust" to run their "local" hospital services – and all against their wishes.

Straddling a huge swathe of south-east London from the Millennium Dome to the M25, and catering for the health needs of some 800,000, the new trust will begin life with massive historic debts of up to £200m.

Bromley's Princess Royal University Hospital Trust alone has a £110m deficit, fuelled by a PFI hospital that is costing far more than it can afford. Greenwich's Queen Elizabeth Hospital Trust, which now admits its PFI contract is "underfunded" to the tune of £8m-£10m a year, is also carrying debts of £65m and projecting a further shortfall this year of almost £6m. And Bexley trust's Queen Mary's Hospital (QMH), Sidcup, the only trust of the three without a major PFI liability, is facing an £11m shortfall this year.

QMH is universally seen as the "soft target" for cuts once the merger is rubber-stamped and the super-trust attempts to balance its books, because to scrap the PFI deals in the other two hospitals could cost £200m-£300m – not to mention the additional fees to buy back the use of their hospital sites.

Health chiefs, no doubt anxious to avoid the embarrassment of the scale of the twin PFI fiascos, have not allowed any public consultation on the merger process, which began in the autumn. A rudimentary, obligatory consultation with staff was due to be completed at the end of January, leaving the local public (and many staff) none the wiser.

After all, the last time they consulted the public on their "A Picture of Health" "reforms" – ie plans to scale down services – they failed to win any significant support. So, eager to avoid opposition to their plans this time, the health chiefs sought legal justification for their refusal to go to public consultation. M'learned friends duly recommended that "the proposed merger was concerned with management and organisational arrangements… so there was no statutory duty to undertake formal consultation". So that's all right, then.

UNITED HEALTH

Texas claims flaw

LABOUR's favourite private American health giant, UnitedHealth, is in trouble again.

It has been fined $1m for short-changing pensioners who signed up to its Evercare health insurance in Texas, and in New York it has agreed a $50m settlement (including provision of a new computer system) after being accused of systematically ripping off patients who claimed reimbursement for care using its flawed Ingenix database (*Eyes passim*).

United appears to be a serial offender, with the Texas department of insurance alone having fined it seven times since 2000 for a total of more than $10m.

The "Nevercare" programme, which claims to save money from public budgets by avoiding the need for costly emergency treatment, was, of course, found to be ineffective in a £4m trial in Britain in 2003-05. But none of UnitedHealth's misdeeds seems to have put off health chiefs and ministers here, who are happy for the firm to help run primary care services and polyclinics and advise trusts on "world class commissioning". But then Tony Blair's former health adviser Simon Stevens, who helped steer the government on to the slippery path to privatisation, is now chief executive of UnitedHealth's sub-division, Ovations, the parent company of Evercare.

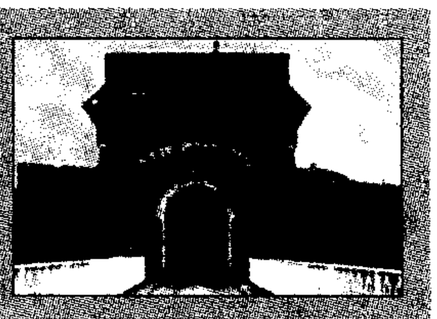
IMMIGRATION

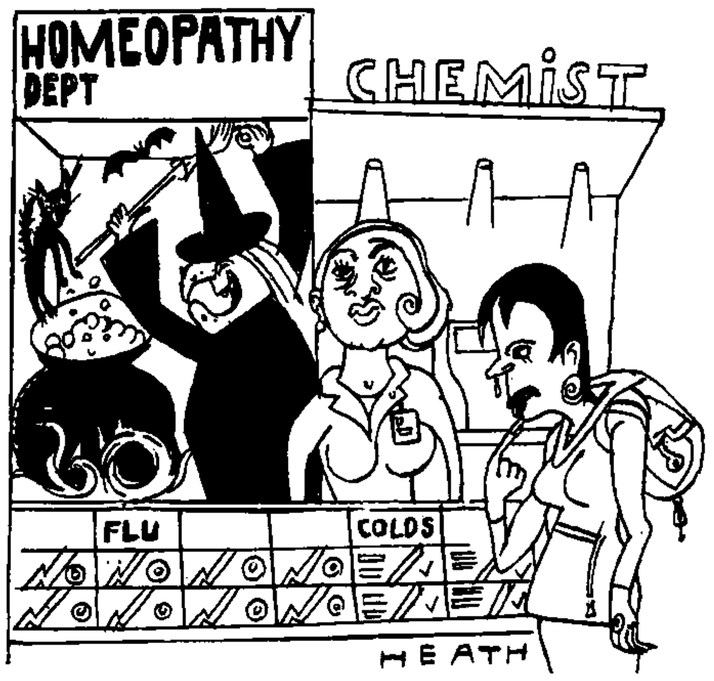
True Brit

A BRITISH man was held in an immigration detention centre "in error" for eight months, even after immigration staff at the centre had recognised his status and had paperwork to prove his nationality.

The case, which was uncovered by inspectors visiting Dover Immigration Removal Centre (pictured) in 2007, was revealed in the Chief Inspector of Prisons' annual report, published last week.

The report also found that children were being detained for even longer periods, with three times as many youngsters being held for more than 28 days than in 2005.





REGULATION

It's quackers

IF A lobby group pushing the interests of the big pharmaceutical companies were to seize control of licensing drugs for the NHS, outrage would follow. Everyone would say that propagandists cannot be regulators because they cannot be trusted to act in the public interest.

Everyone, that is, except the wacky practitioners of alternative medicine, who treat conflicts of interest as something only boring straight scientists need worry about. The Foundation for Integrated Health exists to promote aromatherapy, Reiki, massage therapy, reflexology, homeopathy and a dozen or so other techniques. The treatments share a common absence of double-blind trials which can prove to the paying customers that they actually work.

Now the foundation has established the Complementary & Natural Healthcare Council to regulate practitioners and assure the public they will receive "a positive, safe and effective experience".

Who could possibly think they could get away with this? Step forward, the man behind the Foundation for Integrated Health – His Royal Highness, the Prince of Wales.

The prince's intervention has caused fury and hilarity among straight doctors. The science writer Andy Lewis has dubbed the Complementary & Natural Healthcare Council "OfQuack". Some wag – no names, no pack drill – has even rigged the internet so that when you type www.ofquack.org.uk into an address box, the prince's site pops up under the headline "Ofquack – making quacks look professional since 2008".

Edzard Ernst, professor of complementary medicine at the University of Exeter, is not impressed by the council. He told the *Eye*: "This is ridiculous. It really is a farce.

"All they will need to prove is that they are following an established technique they believe to be appropriate," he added. "It's a ludicrous system."

And yet the therapists are treating HRH with extreme caution. The Society of Homeopaths, for example, declared that it had "yet to assess the suitability and standards of the Natural Healthcare Council for the purpose of providing regulation of homeopaths". In other words, "we're not co-operating".

Meanwhile, the aromatherapists who gather at the website aromaconnection.org lamented: "Within aromatherapy, the low educational entry requirements and abysmal course standards set in UK colleges are a national joke, so setting minimum standards for practitioners will presumably be a great source of material for satirical magazines such as *Private Eye*."

How right he was. But perhaps we shouldn't laugh too loud. Far from telling the prince to fund the council himself, health minister Ben Bradshaw described the code of conduct as "rigorous" and gave the toothless regulator £900,000 of taxpayers' money.

Given that Britain has 150,000 alternative therapists who pocket £4.5bn a year, he might have acted to protect the public. But in health, as in banking, Labour has no interest in imposing tough regulation.

'Ratbiter'

In the City

BONUS BALLS

THE eight largest High Street banks, including those now owned or controlled by the taxpaayer, paid their main board directors almost £220m in mostly cash bonuses in the eight-year lending spree that created the current banking crisis.

In all, the directors received nearly £420m in salary plus bonuses during the boom-to-bust period from 2000 to 2007, which saw the recovery from the bursting of the dotcom bubble lead to the explosion of the housing and credit bubbles. And those figures ignore further substantial payments made to create multi-million-pound pension pots and the proceeds from exercising and selling executive share options – not to mention the perks of office such as cars, travel, housing, relocation grants, financial advice and insurance.

Many of the bank directors became and remain multimillionaires, despite the collapse in share prices – many of these super-managers were never large shareholders, so their pain was never going to be that great.

Cowboy Financial Advisor

So while shareholders ponder the destruction in share values – a total wipeout in the cases of Northern Rock and Bradford & Bingley and a severe diminution for Royal Bank of Scotland and HBOS – the directors responsible are still sitting on unrefundable bonuses for producing what in many cases turned out to be fantasy profits.

At the heart of the results of this survey of pay and bonuses as disclosed in annual reports for 2000 to 2007 – the reports for last year have still to be published – lies the role of the remuneration policies accepted by the banks' non-executive directors, particularly those on the remuneration committees. All the salaries, bonuses and executive incentive share schemes were approved by those committees – and later by shareholders.

All the banks produced ever-growing remuneration committee reports full of detailed charts, graphs and tables so that disclosure was not an issue – to the extent that shareholders outside the institutions could understand or care. When profits were going up there was no reluctance to pay even the most excessive "market rate". Non-execs could say they were protecting shareholders' interests by ensuring their stars were not poached.

But a study of the pay of bank non-executives reveals that they, too, shared in the bonanza – not from bonuses but from fees that ranged from £50,000 to more than £200,000 for carrying out what was in effect a part-time, if responsible and no doubt demanding job.

Non-executive directors on the eight banks surveyed shared approaching £50m in fees over that eight-year period as they consistently agreed to ever-bigger salaries and bonuses and more achievable and remunerative incentive schemes for the executives they notionally oversaw.

The true independence of a non-executive director who is paid more than £100,000 a year is open to substantial question. The non-execs can point to their reliance on expert advice from remuneration experts – but a study of remuneration reports reveals that different banks rely on the same small group of experts – Mercer, Watson Wyatt, Hay, New Bridge Street and Towers Perrin – plus company lawyers and accountants. Furthermore, the comparator for pay policies turned out to be a group in which they all appeared. No wonder, therefore, that pay policies at the banks were mirror images of each other only differentiated by the degree of excess.

With politicians and public alike calling for greedy bankers to be punished, the picture revealed by this survey will fuel calls for reform of how British banks are run, and for changes in the roles and actions both of non-executive directors (the supposed protectors of shareholder interests) and of institutional shareholders (who are likely to be required to be more activist and not prepared to be ignored – as with Legal & General over its demands that RBS sack chairman Sir Tom McKillop and chief executive Sir Fred Goodwin).

What the survey shows is…

Royal Bank of Scotland

Now 70 percent owned by the taxpayer, RBS was an avid devotee of the bonus culture. While it paid its directors some £42m in salaries and fees between 2000 and 2007, it paid another almost £48m in bonuses.

This figure was boosted by payments to its American directors. However, it is no surprise to see that the PM's pal, "Fred the Shred" Goodwin, underlined his and RBS's espousal of the bonus culture. Goodwin collected a total of £7.7m in salary and fees but almost £14m in bonuses before he was forced out by the government bailout.

From 2002 the RBS remuneration committee was headed by Bob Scott, former chief executive of CGNU (now Aviva), and also featured former civil servant Jim Currie. Former banker Colin Buchan was also a subsequent regular member. The lowest-paid RBS non-exec received £70,000 in 2007, while the highest-paid – Scott – received £160,000. Buchan was paid £122,000 and Currie £85,000. Also on the committee was McKillop (on his way out), who was paid a mere £750,000.

On all the banks the non-execs were paid to attend both board meetings and usually one to three committees, so at least monthly meetings. Scott was on three RBS committees, as was Buchan. RBS non-execs were paid more than £6m from 2000.

HBOS

Forced into a merger with Lloyds TSB, aided by a multi-billion-pound dowry from the taxpayer, HBOS was less generous than RBS in its bonus policy. But it still paid its executive directors salaries of more than £32m and bonuses of more than £21m. Chief executive Andy Hornby was the poster boy for the final chapter from 2006, following a line of generously rewarded predecessors. Hornby was paid £4.5m in salary and £3.5m in bonuses.

Three members of the HBOS remuneration committee had been members since the Halifax/ Bank of Scotland merger in 2001: former chief executive of Highland Distillers Sir Brian Ivory, former Weir Group boss Sir Ron Garrick and management consultant Coline McConville. Garrick was paid £235,000 in 2007 and McConville £151,000. Ivory resigned in 2007 but was paid £142,000 in 2006 – reasonable in comparison with chairman Lord Stevenson, who received £821,000. HBOS non-execs also shared more than £6m in fees.

Northern Rock

The first bank to be nationalised, almost a year ago, Northern Rock was more modest in its boardroom pay policies. Executive directors shared just over £12m in salaries, plus another £7.5m in bonuses.

The big-ticket item here was chief executive Adam Applegarth, with a salary of just over £4m and bonuses of £2.5m before he was sacked in December 2007.

The Northern Rock remuneration committee usually met just three times a year. One of its longest-serving members was former NatWest chief executive Sir Derek Wanless, while fund manager Nichola Pease was chairman from 2004 and served from then with Sir Ian Gibson and Adam Fenwick. Their 2007 payments were reduced by the change in management enforced by the government. But in 2006 Wanless was paid £86,000, Pease £65,000, Gibson £80,000 and Fenwick £54,000 – cheap compared with the £300,000 to non-exec chairman Matt Ridley.

Northern Rock's non-execs shared £3.75m as the bank roared towards the cliff edge. In 2001 they were paid £326,000; five years later this had doubled.

Bradford & Bingley

Rescued by the taxpayer and Spanish giant Santander last September after over-indulging on "sub-prime" business, B&B was more modest in the way it rewarded its executives. They received almost £11m in salary and just under £5m in bonuses. Chief executive Steven Crawshaw, who resigned last June with health problems, collected £2.6m plus bonuses of £1.25m from 2002.

Former Institute of Directors director-general George Cox served on the remuneration committee throughout the period. Banker and chairman Rod Kent served on and off from 2002, and management consultant Louise Patten from 2003. Kent was paid £265,000 as chairman in 2007; Cox and Patten just over £50,000 each. Non-execs shared over £3.5m from 2000.

Alliance & Leicester

Taken over by Santander last July, A&L was even more generous with bonuses than Northern Rock. The directors received almost £13m in salary but more than £9.5m in bonuses.

The biggest slice of the pie went to chief executive Richard Pym, who retired in 2007 after receiving £4m in salary and more than £3m in bonuses.

Multi-director Mike McTighe and former BBC and Burton executive Margaret Salmon

☛ *See over...*

THE DIRECTORS

DREDGE & RIGG

were members of the remuneration committee from 2003 and 2004 respectively. Former banker Peter Barton and ex-Procter & Gamble exec Michael Allen were other long-serving members. Barton, who resigned in 2007, was paid £135,000 in 2006. Salmon, McTighe and Allen, who left in 2006, were paid between £55,000 and £68,000. The total for non-exec fees was more than £5m.

Lloyds TSB

The taxpayer is now the largest shareholder in Lloyds Banking Group, with a 43 percent slice as a result of the HBOS bailout. Lloyds did not suffer as badly as HBOS and paid directors a little less. Executive directors shared £27m in salaries plus another £22m in bonuses from 2000.

Chief executive Eric Daniels, who arrived in 2001, has since collected £4.5m in salary but another almost £6m in bonuses.

Before he headed off to RBS in 2004, Sir Tom McKillop was chairman of the remuneration committee. Former Procter & Gamble exec Wolfgang Berndt has been a member since 2003 and former Vodafone executive Sir Julian Horn-Smith from 2005. Chairman Sir Victor Blank is also a member, and has been paid £660,000. The two others received around £90,000 each. Non-executive directors shared some £8m.

HSBC

Protected from the worst excesses of the UK housing bubble, HSBC has been hit hard by its ill-advised 2003 move into the US sub-prime, consumer finance market with the purchase of Household.

HSBC executive directors shared £35m in salary that was exceeded by £42m in bonuses. Chief executive turned chairman Stephen Green pocketed almost £6m in salary and £8m in bonuses. His successor, Mike Geoghegan, who joined the board in 2004, has since earned more than £3m in both salary and bonuses.

Mining group Anglo American chairman Sir Mark Moody-Stuart is a long-serving member of the remuneration committee with former GlaxoSmithKline finance chief John Coombe. For 2007 Moody-Stuart received £125,000 and Coombe £105,000. Since 2000 the many HSBC non-execs have been paid almost £8m.

Barclays

When it comes to bonuses, nobody beats Barclays, thanks to the contribution of Bob Diamond, the American-born head of its investment banking arm.

Barclays executive directors shared over £25m in salary from 2000 and £64m in bonuses. Most of this was paid to Diamond, who only joined the main board in 2005 after years as Barclays' biggest earner. Since then he has been paid a mere £640,000 in salary but a whopping £27m-plus in bonuses. Chief executive John Varley has also not done too badly, earning £5m in salary and £9m in bonuses since 2000.

A long-time chairman of the remuneration committee was city grandee Sir Nigel Rudd, who had been a director since 1996 and earned £200,000. He was replaced by former Customs chairman Sir Richard Broadbent, a director since 2003. Barclays chairman Marcus Agius (pay: £751,000) was also a member. was paid £180,000 for 2007. Together Barclays non-execs have earned more than £6m.

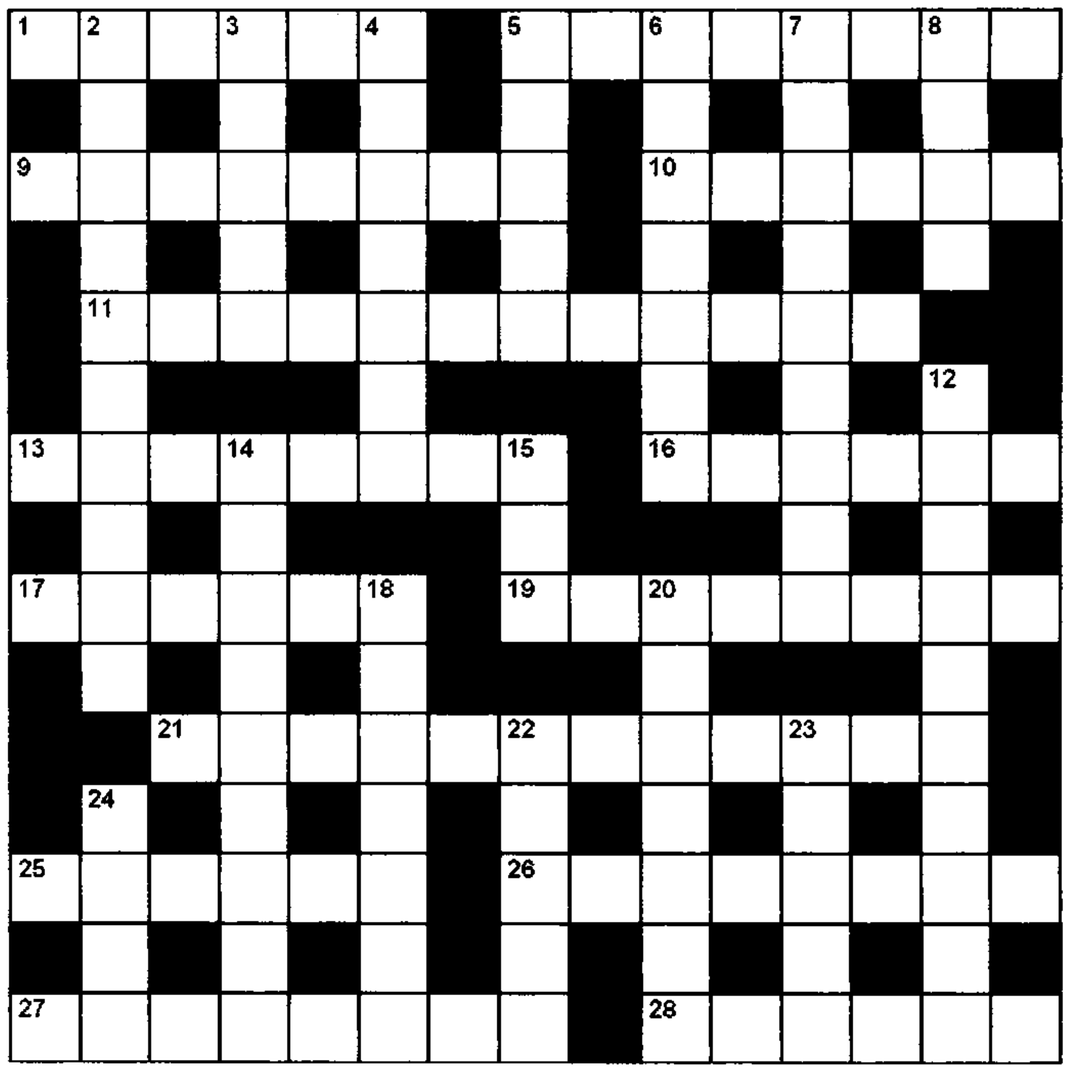
Just how much difference the credit crunch made last year will be seen in the 2008 remuneration reports for those banks that survive. But just how sad Britain's bankers may feel is open to debate, given the money they made from what their former champion Gordon Brown now brands "irresponsible" behaviour.

Reports last week that the new Lloyds had to be persuaded against revising upwards its executive directors' remuneration, despite the current problems and the HBOS legacy, show that at the top end British banks still do not get it when it comes to pay.

'Slicker'

EYE CROSSWORD 384

by Cyclops



£100 prize to first correct solution opened on 13 February 2009

Entries to 'Crossword', Private Eye, 6 Carlisle Street, London W1D 3BN or via email to crossword@private-eye.co.uk

Answers to clues marked * are some of the "pseudo names" used by Eye correspondents a few issues ago.

ACROSS

1 Bill in middle of a 69, for example? That could be counted on (6)
5 Talking like a politician from Washington, fellow having an affair (8)
9 National (inept) gay movement (8)
10 Rings politician before a hard band member's blast (6)
11 See 5dn.
13 Brand, say, standing by the man Ross? (8)
16 Emasculated religious adherent needs to consume energy breakfast? (6)
17 Drug-impounding trials? Balls! (6)
19* Blond pissed with rum – dated narcotic, you might say (4,4)
21 Pisshead beaten up with toilet (end bits broken off), very badly beaten? (12)
25 Fool, the old US president, a leader hanging on to power at all costs (6)
26 Idiot PM's tone (3-5)
27 Thus "crunched" and depressed, Woolworth's had to (4,4)
28 Conservative bloke's into S and M, getting rupture (6)

DOWN

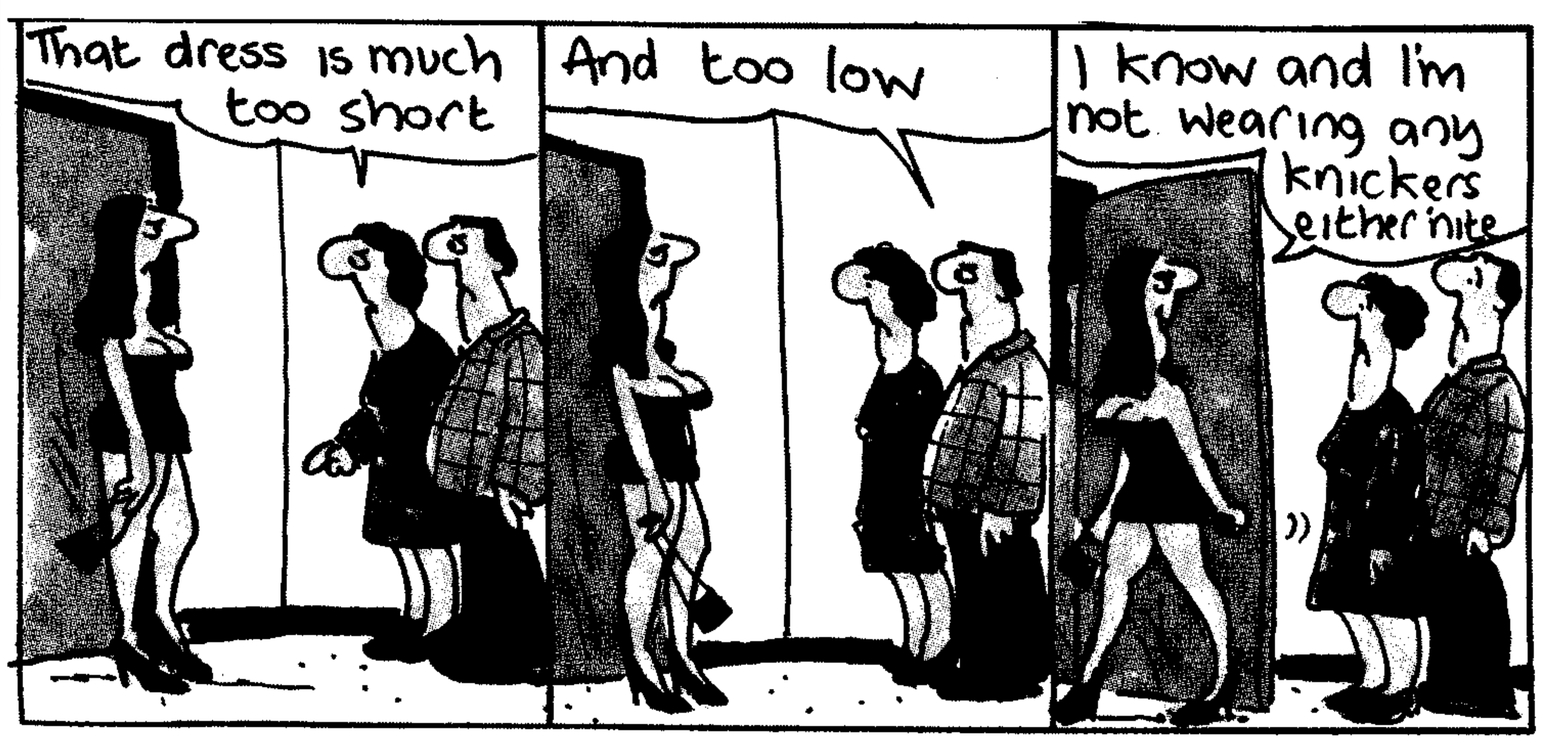
2 Supermodel-like doctor's valise? (3,2,5)
3 Get into trouble having "bust sex" (3,2)
4 Plant causing Alastair Campbell's thing to have an ejaculation (7)
5/11* Arty sister meets "Big Boy" with yen to spill beans on leader of Senate; then it's over (5,12)
6 See 24dn.
7 Reeling drunk with internal chronic fatigue is a garish sickly colour? (4,5)
8 Boat builder's absence of expression of sexual satisfaction? (4)
12 Fools welcoming PM's U-turn in commercial suppressions (5-5)
14 "Anus rot" complication in one time long-distance traveller (9)
15 Love revealed by cunnilingus (3)
18 Chief perversion of Euro MPs (7)
20 Tells of pee having to be removed from church leaders (7)
22 See 23dn.
23/22 * Sharon ain't getting broadcast! That should help lift depression, you say? (5,5)
24/6* Brassy thing said "Badly hung – uh! I'm off!" (4,7)

Crossword 383 winner: ALAN HEPWORTH

ACROSS: 1 Epitaph 5 Pass off 9/21 Kama Sutra 10 Melbourne 12 Flippant 13 Get off 14/25 Saviour of the world 18/26 Well-oiled 20 Raspberry 23 Sea-dog 27 Hot potato 28/17 Loophole 29 Student 30 Off-days.

DOWN: 2 Phallus 3 Tramp 4 Pompadour 6 Among 7 Stretcher 8 Fretful 11 Later 15 Validated 16 Fobbed off 19 Eye-shot 22 Yellowy 24 Groin.

HUSBAND



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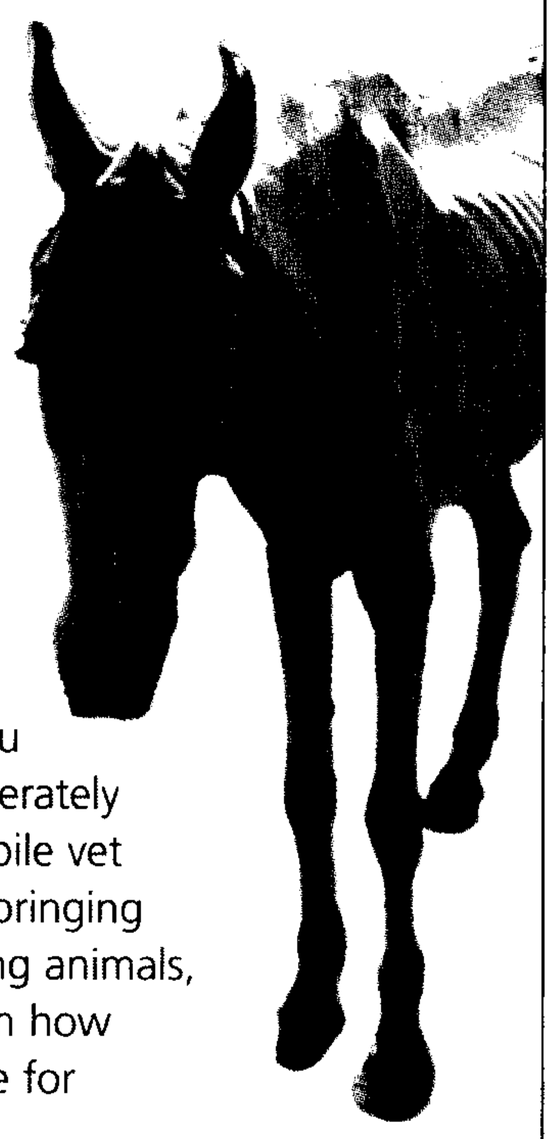

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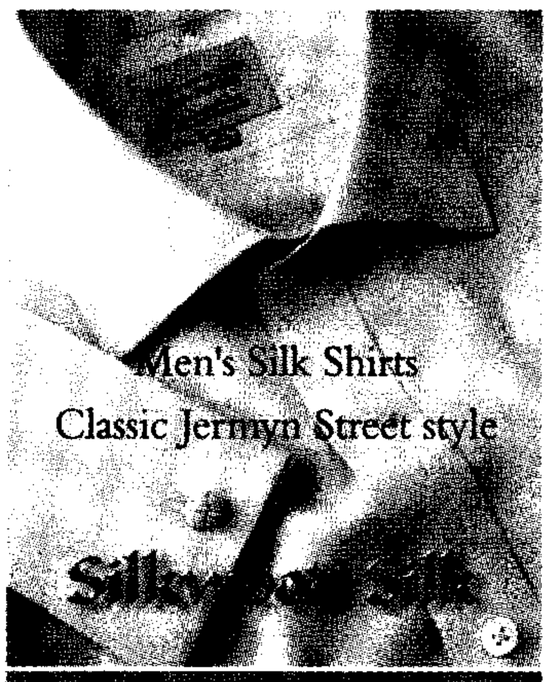

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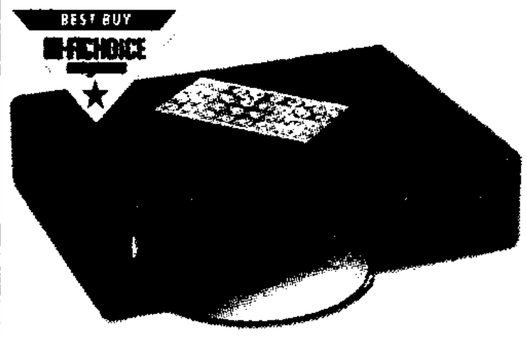

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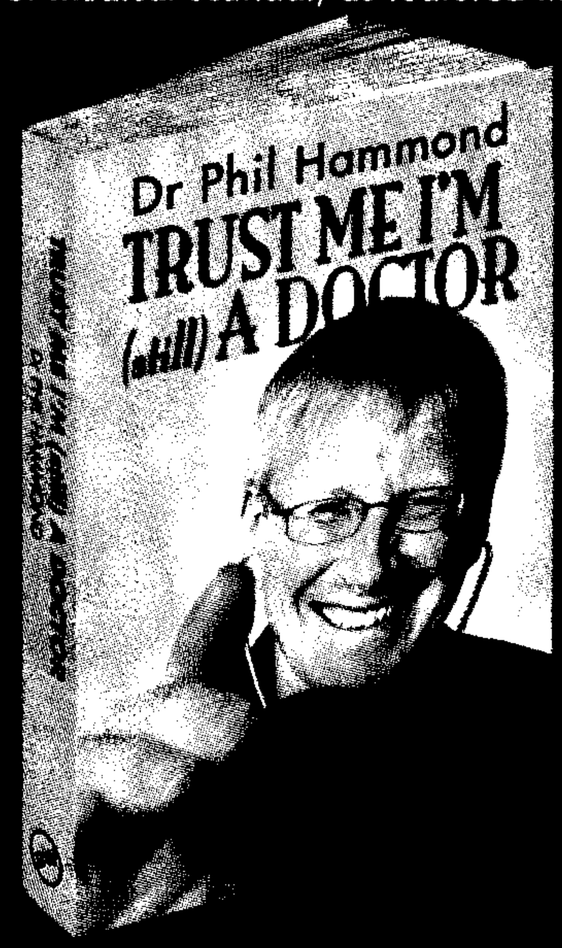

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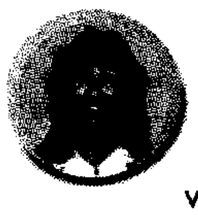

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